



1. Starting The Team

In one sense, a teacher needs only two personal attributes to start and sustain a successful debate program: time and dedication. If she is willing to invest these assets into coaching, she will be able to provide her school's students with a valuable and enjoyable experience. Of course, there are a number of more concrete things she will need to use her time and dedication to acquire or accomplish, and these things are the topics of this chapter.

The Bare Necessities

The debate team will need a home – which is typically referred to as the “Team Room”. Often, the Team Room may be a classroom for after-school meetings. The Team Room should have a chalkboard or wipe-board and enough seats and desks for every member of the team. Ideally, there should be storage space in the Team Room as well. Policy debate teams quickly acquire a large amount of materials and information that they need to keep somewhere. If these materials end up in a closet or office that is not under the coach's control, it could easily disappear or be inaccessible when needed.

Computers and internet access are also very helpful. In the past ten years, internet-based research in debate has become a necessity. If there are no computers in the Team Room, the coach should attempt to secure access to a computer lab or a bank of computers in the library. Students may have access to computers at home and would be able to do some of their research there after school. The ability to find, process and evaluate information from the internet is one of the most valuable skills students will learn from debate. For this skill to be developed to the fullest, the coach should be on-hand at the start to guide her debaters.

Another essential resource is a printer. Students will need to print the documents and briefs they prepare from their research. The printer should be accessible in the same room as the computers, but this is not essential. If necessary, students could use the computers in a school lab or even at home, and then print in the Team Room. Storing the printer in the Team Room is the most convenient location.

Managing the Time Demands of Being a Coach

At a bare minimum, coaching requires the coach to stay after school at least once a week to hold a team meeting, and to attend a few weekend tournaments. Ambitious coaches may hold multiple practices per week, attend many tournaments, seek out other training opportunities, attend summer workshops, coordinate fundraisers, and host special events such as team dinners and public debates. Consider the following strategies for minimizing the time burden that their debate team imposes on them:

Limit student access. While a coach will want to be available to her debaters, she also needs to set limits. If she gives out your cell phone or home phone number, students will use it. They may also take it to mean that calling five minutes before a practice to say they aren't coming is acceptable. While there are worse problems to have than students who are so interested in debate that they want to stay after school every day to work on it, this is something that comes up on occasion. Communicate limits clearly and consistently to generate respect.

Seek assistance. Some leagues provide coaches with assistants from local university debate teams. Even in these leagues, many coaches still choose to recruit a fellow teacher to serve as an assistant coach. These assistants are a valuable resource, and the coach should learn to delegate some responsibilities to free up personal time.

Encourage student leadership. Encourage debaters do as much of the work as possible. Students who have been to summer debate institutes may well know more about debate than their coach, and if they are mature they can often be trusted to judge a JV practice round or take primary responsibility for teaching a given topic. While the coach should certainly play a role directing and coordinating the research and strategizing that her team does, it should not be her responsibility to cut evidence or write blocks. Instead, assign these tasks to students and offer guidance as necessary.

The individual debaters on the team will need to share evidence and briefs with each other. Therefore, one more useful resource for the debate team would be access to a photocopier. The photocopier does not have to be in the Team Room, but generally a successful debate team will need to use one frequently, so easy access is recommended. While some sharing may take place using the printer – printing multiple copies, one for each team – often a photocopier is a quicker and less expensive option.

Photocopiers, as well as printers, can require some additional supplies and maintenance. This means the coach must not only have access to a photocopier, but must know how to replace paper and toner/print cartridges and fix paper jams. Small, portable printers may be taken to tournaments and are often helpful in that role for last minute sharing and research. To keep photocopying costs down, coaches should make every effort to encourage students not to lose their evidence and other materials. That often means providing organizational supplies such as individual file folders, expanding file folders, and rubber storage bins. If students have multiple bins of evidence, carts or hand-trucks may be necessary to help them transport it.

Recruiting Team Members

Once the above structural resources are in place, the coach needs to find debaters to comprise their team. The first priority of building a debate team has to be recruitment. No other factor influences the long-term success of a debate team as much as student interest. Recruitment strategies have a direct bearing on the enthusiasm levels of your students.

The good news is there are several ways to recruit students to be on the debate team.

Most coaches hold an introductory meeting – we'll call it the Informational Meeting – that allows them to tell interested students about the debate team. At the Informational Meeting find out which students want to take on the challenge and opportunity of being a member. Attrition rates from these meetings can be well over 50%, which means that to end up with a core group of 8-10 committed students, a coach should try to get 25 or more to come to this first meeting.



Obvious recruitment choices include students who are considered 'talkative' or who have displayed an interest in government or politics. It is important, however, not to overlook students who are shy about speaking or who struggle with their class work. Although it may take a personalized and concerted effort to recruit these students, they are typically the ones who have the most to gain from an activity like debate. Other teachers at your school may be willing and able to help you identify potential team members based on these criteria.



Recruitment Strategies

Fliers. To attract a large number of students to the informational meeting hand out and post fliers around the school touting the various benefits of debate: college scholarships, opportunities to travel, improvement in reading and other academic skills, the thrill of competition, and the joy of arguing!

Class presentations. Other teachers, especially those in English or Social Studies departments, may allow the prospective coach to make a brief presentation during their classes to tell their students about the team. If available, distribute a photocopy of a news article about other Urban Debate Leagues. There is a video of a *60 Minutes* segment on an Urban Debate League that could be shown to prospective students.

Other students. Coaches who already have a team in place (or a few early committed new members) and are looking to recruit more debaters should have their veterans give presentations and otherwise assist with recruitment. They will most likely be more effective at appealing to their peers than a teacher. Many students have reported that the single most important factor in their decision to join a debate team was that their friends were involved.

Food. Free food, such as cookies or fruit, is often a very appealing incentive for high school students, especially at the end of the day. Once you get them in the door with the food you will have to convince them with your arguments, though.

Extra credit. If the debate coach teaches a class that is related to debating (such as government, speech or even history) she may offer extra school credit to students who show up and participate meaningfully on the debate team.

Other teachers. Take the time to inform their colleagues about the value of debate, and the initiation of the new debate program. These other teachers should be recruited to recommend specific students for the team. The coach and/or existing team members should follow up directly with these students.



The Informational Meeting

One goal of the Informational Meeting is to outline the benefits of participation on the debate team to the recruits. These benefits include competition, opportunities to travel, positive effects on grades, and enhancing opportunities for college scholarships. The critical thinking skills of reasoning, listening and speaking are also obvious points to highlight, as is the development of inter-personal qualities of self-confidence and communication. Don't forget to make the point that arguing can be fun! To demonstrate their potential travel destinations the coach could hand out a tentative tournament schedule to demonstrate their potential travel destinations. Once the coach feels she has made some inroads on a few students, encourage them to recruit their friends to join the team as well.

As with most other important extra-curricular activities, being on the debate team is not all fun and games. It takes hard work to succeed. The self-discipline and work habits the students learn from participating in debate are another compelling reason for their involvement, but are probably not the most persuasive reasons to tell them at the start.

From the beginning, students should have a realistic expectation of the time commitment it takes to be an effective debater – just like it is a substantial time commitment to be successful in the marching band, academic teams or athletic squads. An important purpose of the Informational Meeting, therefore, should be to communicate to students exactly what participation on the team will entail and what will be expected of them. Avoid the temptation to downplay the 'costs' of debate, that is, the time, effort, and dedication it will require. Students who join the team with false expectations will be more difficult to retain once the true costs in terms of time become evident.

Setting Expectations

Clear communication of expectations to students is essential. Here are a few of the issues to resolve before the coach holds the Informational Meeting with the prospective student recruits:

Practices. How many weekly practices will be held, and how many must they attend?

Tournaments. How many tournaments will each student have to attend?

Notice for Missing Events. What kind of notice will a student have to give if they are late for or absent from a practice or tournament?

Research. How much research or other work will they have to do on their own time?

Team Events. Will they be required to help with special events sponsored by the Debate Team, such as fundraisers, hosting a tournament or public debates?



Instead, while the coach should emphasize the many benefits of debate, the coach making clear that it takes hard work to achieve them. Students will get the message most clearly if they are presented with a list of concrete expectations: students must come to at least one team meeting a week, attend at least three tournaments, give adequate notice and a valid explanation for any practices they miss, etc. Even if the coach ultimately decides to be more lenient than this, it doesn't hurt to set the bar high at the beginning.

Of course, if the Informational Meeting is nothing more than a list of demands, few if any students will want to join the team. The best way to hook students on debating is to let them try their hand at it. At the Informational Meeting you can have the students engage in mini-debates. The topics for these debates should be ones they already know a lot about and would consider fun or interesting to argue about.

Give every student the opportunity to present one or two short speeches (one minute in length) on these topics. This activity can have as much or as little organization as the coach chooses to give it, as the primary goal is just to let the students do a little spontaneous debating and leave eager to do more. It is important that the topics concern issues the students know a lot about so they will not be as nervous speaking in public. Compliment their efforts speeches by pointing out strengths in their speeches.

Sample Mini-Debate Topics for the Informational Meeting

School policies: "Should our school have a dress code?"

Politics: "Is George Bush the worst President ever?"

Music: "Who is the most important rap musician today?"

Sports: "Who is a better quarterback, Vince Young or Tom Brady?"

Creative: "Should America have a King?"

Students will most likely be curious to know exactly what kind of debating they will be doing. A list of rules doesn't capture the spirit of the activity nearly as well as a live performance. Having veteran debaters from another school or even another UDL in a nearby city put on a short demonstration debate is a much better way of showing students what they'll be getting into. If there aren't any experienced debaters available, videotapes of demonstration debates could serve this purpose. Be sure to leave time at the end of the meeting to answer any questions that students may have.



Following Up with Potential Recruits

Tell them how to participate. Be prepared to tell students when and where the next Team Meeting will be. Distribute an informational flier or brochure that contains this information, along with other materials summarizing the benefits of being a member of the team.

Get commitments. Before students leave the Informational Meeting give them an opportunity to commit to coming to the next Team Meeting.

Track them down. Some student won't want to commit on the spot, but don't leave it up to them to report later that they are interested. Find other students who were at the Informational Meeting and use them to encourage the rest of the students to attend the Team Meeting.

Show confidence in them. Students who aren't confident that debate is right for them will often be persuaded to give it a try if a teacher makes clear that she believes it is. For students whose parents are frequently busy or largely absent from their life, the opportunity to connect with an adult who takes a meaningful interest in their personal development is a tempting and ultimately rewarding one.

Building Support in the School

While students are the most important part of the debate team, coaches should also try to build support among their fellow teachers, the parents of students at the school, and the school administration. These other supporters can assist in recruitment, advocacy for the team, securing access to school resources, and otherwise making the coach's job more manageable.

Teachers

Other teachers are often the easiest to enlist, as they will have the opportunity to see first-hand how debate is benefiting students in their classes. Take advantage of opportunities to tell them about the many benefits of debate and keep them abreast of the team's accomplishments.

The support of other teachers is valuable for many reasons, not least of which is that students may need to get permission to miss class on occasion to attend tournaments or other events. Teachers are much more likely to make this concession if they know the educational benefits of the activity. They may also recommend students from their classes whom they feel would make good debaters. Teachers who are especially taken by debate may even be willing to help out as judges or assistant coaches.

School Administration

The support of the school administration may be a little more difficult to win, but it is no less important. The principal is often overworked and forced to balance the interests of a large number of competing groups: students, teachers, parents, the community at large, and her bosses at the district and/or state level. Combine these pressures with short tenure, strict accountability regimes, and (in many areas) a trend towards loss of control over the hiring of school faculty, and the result is a principal who, no matter how well-intentioned, may not have much time, money, or interest to devote to the school debate team.

Nevertheless, the principal is an invaluable ally. She and other administrators may be able to provide financial assistance for special events, and often control access to school resources such as computers, photocopiers, and classrooms. Principals who understand the value of debate are more likely to agree to host a tournament, grant permission for debaters to miss class to travel to a tournament, provide a coach stipend, or introduce a debate class into the school.

As school administrators are less likely than other teachers to see the benefits of debate immediately, coaches should make a special effort to exhibit them. Announce team achievements over the school intercom and post them on your classroom door, display trophies and other awards prominently, and talk up the benefits of debate for students and the school. Of course, the students themselves are the best evidence. When possible, arrange for them to speak at faculty meetings or obtain permission for them to come to a meeting with the principal.

The Principal's Bottom Line

As undesirable as they may find this fact, school principals are frequently forced to think in terms of their own bottom line: standardized test scores. Fortunately, debate makes students better at reading, writing, critical thinking, and organizing their thoughts logically. A recent study by the University of Missouri's Linda Collier found that students participating in a UDL improve their standardized reading scores by 25% more than their non-debating peers over the course of a single year. Statistics like these, as well as anecdotes about 'success case' students, can be very persuasive to school administrators.

If she has time, the principal may accept an invitation to a tournament, awards dinner, public debate, or other special event, and even if she doesn't have time she will still appreciate the offer. Giving her an opportunity to participate genuinely in the formulation of the vision for the team is another way to entice interest and secure long-term support. Above all, be aware of the principal's situation and respect the many demands on her time.

Parents

Finally, informing parents of students about the debate team is very important. Even parents who don't generally take an active interest in their child's education have the power to forbid their son or daughter from attending a tournament or staying after school for practice. However, if these same parents understand that debate can help their child improve grades or be accepted to and pay for college, they may be more willing to permit her to participate. Some parents who are convinced about the value of debate may encourage their child to join and agree to serve as judges or assistant coaches.

Attempt speaking directly with the parent(s) of all students on the team in order to communicate what membership on the team will entail for their child. This means talking about the benefits of the activity as well as the expectations. The coach can reach a larger audience of parents by speaking (or having her debaters speak) about debate at a PTA meeting. The PTA can also be a source of funding for special events such as invitational tournaments or team parties.





Building Support Outside of the School

When the school looks good, the school administration looks good. That means as the team generates positive attention from the media, colleges and universities, local businesses, or educational organizations, the coach will likely earn the appreciation of the principal and the respect of higher-ups such as district superintendents and local politicians.

Special Events

Publicizing tournament results is one way to increase the team's visibility, but that may not be as 'newsworthy' as other events. Holding an awards banquet to celebrate the successes of the team's first year (making it through is success enough!), a public debate on an issue of local concern, or a public forum event with a local politician, policymaker, or academic are other ways to build alliances and attract positive attention. Invite parents, teachers, students who are not already members of the team, the principal, relevant school district administrators, local politicians, and anyone else who has supported the team or who might do so in the future. Even if these invitations are declined the invitation, their recipients have still been reminded about the team and its successes.

The Media

Events can be publicized with promotional flyers, an article in the school newspaper, or a press release sent to local news outlets. Media attention and the presence of local dignitaries are mutually reinforcing: the press is more likely to cover an event when public figures will be in attendance, and the promise of a good photo-op will attract politicians and administrators.

Some school districts may have rules that govern how and when their employees may interact with the media. Be familiar with these policies before planning a publicity strategy.

A Word of Caution in Dealing with the Media

When working with the media, think carefully about the message to communicate, and phrase press releases or responses during interviews appropriately. Some reporters will be tempted to portray a debate team at an urban high school as a 'diamond in the rough'. Their angle on the story may be about how nice it is that for once urban youth are settling disputes with words rather than weapons, or about how debate keeps kids occupied after school, when they would otherwise be dealing drugs, committing crimes, and becoming teenage parents. While debate is a real solution to real problems such as these, coaches must be cautious about allowing the media to reinforce negative stereotypes about their neighborhood or their school.

Politicians and Staff

When working with politicians, school administrators, and similar potential allies, the key to success is making simple, deliverable requests and following up on them as necessary. While it may not be possible to follow up with a high-profile supporter directly, assistants and secretaries may be more important targets for persuasion anyway, as they often guide their bosses' decisions or even make them outright. A state senator's chief of staff, for example, is more likely than the senator herself to handle a request for funding or schedule the senator to make an appearance at an event.

Even capturing the attention of the assistants of especially high-profile figures can be difficult, and having a personal 'in' is a huge advantage in these situations. By building a network of supporters among

community activists, of people who know people. Although the superintendent spouse's cousin may could make an follow up on a



Requests are more when they allow for to develop over help coaches

complicated web of written and unwritten rules within the school system and to keep abreast of changes in the political climate.

parents, teachers, and the coach creates a pool people who know the coach may not know personally, a colleague's know his secretary, who appointment and help to request.

likely to be approved a meaningful partnership time. These partnerships navigate the often-

Even once someone has made a commitment, it may be necessary to remind her or her staff several times to carry it out. Don't feel guilty about being a thorn in the side, however; it may be the only way to receive notice in a busy office, and public figures that have made commitments understand that they will be held accountable for carrying them out.

2. Running The Team

Getting a team off the ground is often the most difficult part of coaching. Once the infrastructure for the team is in place, the coach has to keep the ball rolling while helping students get the most out of the activity, both competitively and educationally. While this may sound relatively simple, there are many aspects of actually running the team that takes thought and effort.

Recruitment and Retention

The first year's group of students is always the hardest to assemble. Once they are established as members of the team, they will attract friends and younger siblings in future years. Others will join the team as they observe the fun and success experienced by its current members.

Coaches also face a battle against attrition, however. High school students are often busy, and debate requires a serious commitment of time and energy that not all of them can or want to make. Some will join the team not realizing how much work it will be, and decide it is too much for them. Jobs, responsibilities at home, schoolwork, personal relationships, or other extracurricular activities will cut into time students once had for debate. Still others will simply lose interest and quit.



While some of these factors are unavoidable, there are many things a coach can do to keep students interested in the debate team. The most important principle is to keep participation fun. While no one enjoys losing, it's an inevitable part of competition of any kind. If the most successful members of the team are the only ones enjoying themselves and getting individualized attention from the coach, they will be the only ones who will stick around. Winning has only a very loose connection to the educational benefits of



debate, and it is quite possible for a student never to win a round and still receive great benefits from participating.

Make sure the students understand the value they are receiving merely from participating. Winning isn't everything. Focus their attention on areas of improvement from one tournament to the next. Often, improvement can be measured in certain ways that do not involve the judge's bottom line on the ballot. Are the debaters more prepared? Do they use less preparation time in their rounds? Are they asking better questions in cross-examination? Are they completing solid research assignments? These are examples of areas where students can gain a sense of accomplishment regardless of their record at a tournament. In the end, however, students who are not as successful as they want to be will need encouragement from their coach and from the other members of the team if they are going to stick it out through a long losing streak.

Student retention is one of the many benefits of team unity. When a debate team works as a family, practices and tournaments are more fun for everyone and members remain committed. A debater whose partner is also a friend is less likely to skip a tournament because she will not want to let her friend down. Ideally, debaters will enjoy participating on the team so much they will help with coaching and judging even after they have graduated.



Nuts and Bolts: Building Team Unity

Team unity doesn't just happen on its own; teams actively cultivate it by:

Working together. Conduct brainstorming sessions at the Team Meeting where everyone discusses a popular argument and collectively works out a strategy for answering it.

Sharing evidence. Photocopy or print multiple copies of research done by any member of the team and distribute it to everyone.

Celebrating together. If everyone on the team contributes to the work effort and shares evidence, then success by any member of the team is a victory for everyone and should be treated that way.

Practicing together. Assign everyone on the squad to watch an after-school practice debate between two teams on the squad. Discuss the round afterward. Emphasize fun and education over winning in these rounds so as not to cause intra-squad competition. Don't announce a winner of the practice round; just discuss what was good and bad about each team's performance.

Dressing alike. Team t-shirts or jackets with varsity letters can be a great way to build morale, celebrate successes, and reward students who stay on the team for several years. Students can dress alike at tournaments or during travel.

Watching and scouting elimination rounds. If one team from the squad is in elimination rounds, everyone else should lend their support by watching the round or scouting other elimination rounds.

Teaching each other. Build a team culture where older and more experienced students pass on their knowledge to younger members of the team. This is especially helpful when the coach is not an expert in debate herself, in which case varsity debaters may know more about the topic. Assigning older debaters to mentor younger debaters inspires and educates both parts of the working relationship.

Respecting each other. Insist that all members of the team cooperate constructively, resolve their differences peacefully, and generally get along. The role model provided by the coach in this regard is crucial by always treating students fairly and respectfully.]

It is necessary to provide a word of warning about team unity, though. It can go overboard, and become 'clique-y', which will turn off new recruits. Make an effort to recruit a variety of students rather than a pre-established group of friends. If the team is all men, make an effort to recruit women, and vice versa. The same idea is important for racial composition of the team in certain situations. Work diligently to keep the team atmosphere welcoming to newcomers. Participating in events other than tournaments, such as public debates or other forensics activities, can broaden the team's horizons.



Weekly Meetings

The team should meet after school at least once a week – we'll call it the Team Meeting. For the sake of establishing a memorable routine it is best for the Team Meeting always to be at the same time and place, if possible. Even if the team moves quickly to the school library or computer lab, students should still begin the Team Meeting in their usual classroom and then leave to go to another location. This reinforces the idea that debate is a regular commitment to be kept and prevents students from forgetting to show up or showing up in the wrong place (intentionally or unintentionally). Team Meetings should also end at a standard time so that parents will know when to expect their children to be home.

Some coaches have separate Team Meetings for junior varsity and varsity debaters. This has the advantage of allowing targeted lessons based on student experience levels. A drawback of separate Team Meetings is the disruption of team unity and preventing younger students from learning from their more experienced counterparts. A better idea might be to have one meeting for everyone, and a second meeting, either on another day or for an extra hour afterwards, that is required for varsity students and optional for junior varsity debaters.

Setting the Agenda for Weekly Team Meetings

Debaters tend to be social by nature, even more so if the coach has done a good job of cultivating team unity. Although this should generally be encouraged, it can make Team Meetings slow, inefficient, unproductive, and annoying to everyone involved. Establish a clear agenda and objectives for each Team Meeting. This will focus the students' energy.

Brainstorming. Especially at the beginning of a new season or after a long break, teams should discuss how arguments have changed and what they will need to be prepared to debate.

Strategizing. Lead a discussion of the pros and cons of different affirmative cases or develop strategies for answering a new affirmative case or negative off-case position being run in their league. Assign at least one member of the team to keep a list of the arguments you discuss. At subsequent meetings you can return to this list to check on progress.

Researching. The team might visit the computer lab or library in order to research a new argument. Or, they might settle down with scissors and tape to process and brief evidence.

Learning. Of course students should always be learning, but the coach might set aside an entire practice to teach a new skill, concept, or argument. This could include a lecture and a follow-up activity.

De-Briefing. After a tournament, the team should share their experiences to learn what worked, what didn't, and what arguments are out there which hadn't previously been considered.

Establishing Partnerships

In policy debate, students compete in teams of two. A debater's partner is her closest ally and learning companion on the team, so it is important for the two of them to get along. They don't have to be best friends. Debating with someone you consider your best friend has both advantages and disadvantages. But whether or not debate partners are best friends they must be able to work together constructively.

There are several ways to assign debate partnerships on a squad. One method would be to allow the students to pair up on their own without interference from the coach. A second method would be for the coach to determine partnerships unilaterally. There are approaches in between these extremes. Debaters could be permitted to offer input, which the coach would accept unless there are unusual circumstances. A coach might have a policy to accept any mutual partner requests. Finally, a coach might allow debaters to indicate one or two members of the squad that they would essentially "veto" or prefer not to have as a partner. There is no right way to assign partners.

There are some factors to consider when evaluating partner decisions. Many students will join the activity knowing who they want their partner to be. There's nothing wrong with that. Debate is a voluntary activity that should be enjoyable, so there is often no need to force students to work with someone they don't want to work with.

While it is a good idea to give students input in their partner assignments, there are a few criteria to keep in mind about what makes a good partnership besides cooperation. The most obvious is ability level. If a varsity debater convinces her best friend to join the team as a novice, the two may want to debate together. While this could be an educational experience for the beginning debater, it could also be an intimidating one: she will have to start right off debating in the varsity division and will always feel like she is holding her partner back. Also, for competitive reasons, the coach might prefer to have her strongest debaters partnered with each other.

Another consideration is argument or style interest. If one debater likes debating disadvantages and counterplans and the other prefers critiques, they may frequently disagree about negative strategy. Then again, a coach may favor the notion that their abilities will complement each other well. As long as the coach helps them to negotiate their disagreements, this could well turn into a very productive partnership.





A final important factor to consider is the extent to which each student is invested in the activity. Debaters interested in attending every tournament and going to summer institutes should not be partnered with those who are doing the bare minimum. It isn't fair to the hard-working student, and it will quickly create a substantial ability gap and personality conflicts.

Generally partnerships are established at the start of the year based on input from debaters and a series of practice debates. During the early sessions the coach can listen to all the debaters to determine compatibility. The coach may want to try different combinations in these practice sessions.

Once partnerships are determined at the start of the year a coach might have reasons to revisit their decisions. Debaters may grow apart in terms of their compatibility or interest in traveling to tournaments. Coaches should be willing to consider changing partnerships after a few tournaments. Often repairing teams might permit two debaters to attend a tournament they otherwise might not have been able to, if their original partners could not participate that weekend for some reason.

Nuts and Bolts: Troubleshooting Partner Assignments

Problems will inevitably arise among partners, but the coach should be hesitant to break up team assignments once they are established. The time that the debaters have spent getting to know each other and learning to work together will be wasted. Working through difficult relationships is an important life skill. Following are some common problems that may arise and solutions the coach should explore before breaking up a team:

Problem 1: Strategic disagreements. Partners frequently disagree about which arguments to make or extend during a round.

Solution: Help them make these decisions as much as possible before the round begins and then encourage them to stick with what they've decided. At the very least, discuss the criteria they should use so that they have some common ground to resort to when making these decisions. Finally, there should be a firm rule that in the event of a dispute that cannot be resolved quickly, the debater giving the last rebuttal has the final word, as she is the one who will have to sell the team's case at the end of the round. This works best when one partner is the last rebuttalist on the Affirmative and the other on the Negative, so that they will share this power equally.

Problem 2: Personality conflicts. The partners have had a fight or are otherwise angry with each other.

Solution: If the students cannot resolve the problem themselves, the coach or a mature member of the team can play the role of mediator. As a last resort, the coach could separate them for one tournament as a cooling off period.



Problem 3: Imbalanced Partnership.

One partner feels like the other is holding her back or constantly making mistakes in the round.

Solutions: Watch the team debate together and talk to their judges. If there is some truth to this claim, discuss with the better debater methods for helping her partner to improve.

Encourage her to focus on the skills

that her partner does possess. Even if she is generally stronger than her partner, the partner may still surpass her in some ways. They should be encouraged to learn from each other. In the end, though, substantial differences in ability may be a valid reason to separate a team, especially if caused by one student working much harder than the other. If, on the other hand, the coach does

Nuts and Bolts: Troubleshooting Partner Assignments (cont.)

not feel that there is actually a noticeable ability gap, she should discuss the issue with the complaining debater. Debate tends to inflate egos, so it may be necessary to bring this student's head out of the clouds by pointing out areas in which she needs improvement and emphasizing ways in which her partner makes valuable contributions to the team.

Problem 4: Romantic involvement. Debate partners spend a lot of time working closely together, and among high school students this can easily lead into romantic involvement. This isn't actually a problem in itself, but it can create some real headaches. Debate partners often spend a substantial amount of time alone together, and the coach must be able to trust that they will behave appropriately while they are on her watch. Break-ups, of course, are likely to lead to a host of problems.

Solution: As long as the coach makes her expectations concerning conduct clear and feels that she can trust the students she doesn't need to play a heavy-handed role here. Following a break-up, however, she will probably want to separate the debaters, at least temporarily. At least one of the two will probably be uncomfortable around the other, interfering with their ability to work together at best and creating opportunities for sexual harassment at worst.

Problem 5: Chronic absenteeism. One student routinely misses practices or competitions, leaving the partner hanging.

Solution: This may require breaking up the team. It is simply not fair to the student who works hard and shows up regularly to miss out on opportunities to compete because of an unreliable partner. Hopefully, coaches will nip this problem in the bud by communicating expectations about attendance early and often. Try making clear to the unreliable debater the impact that she is having on her partner, but if this doesn't work re-assign the debaters so that the harder-working student is not adversely affected any further. Students who are not meeting attendance expectations may need to be temporarily suspended or barred from further involvement with the team.

Student Leadership

There is a lot of work involved in running a debate team, and while the coach is ultimately responsible for all of it, she shouldn't try to handle every detail. Ultimately, the team exists to benefit the students, so there is every reason to expect members of the team to pitch in to help keep it running smoothly. Leadership roles are also potentially valuable additions to your students' in term of college or job applications.

Often, a team leadership structure will develop on its own. Students most taken by the activity will invest more time and energy into improving their skills and may naturally want to share their expertise with less experienced students who look up to them. As these students also have the most vested interest in the continuation of the team, they will probably be most willing to help out with less fun tasks such as fundraising and record-keeping. Coaches should keep an eye out for such a developing dynamic in order to nurture it in productive ways.

The coach may choose simply to appoint these natural leaders to positions of responsibility or to hold elections. The results will probably be similar. If the coach has noticed emerging leaders, the students most likely have as well, and will tend to formalize the roles that those students are already playing.



In the rare circumstance where a natural leadership structure does not emerge, if no students are willing to take on these extra responsibilities, or if a leadership-based system of sharing responsibilities proves divisive, the coach may choose instead to delegate responsibility on a case-by-case basis and require all team members to pitch in. On a large team, students might be assigned to committees for recruitment, fundraising, etc. Be upfront about these requirements when students are joining the team. They will be much more cooperative if they do not feel as though the coach has pulled a bait-and-switch on them.



Leadership Positions

If a coach chooses to assign formal leadership roles to students they should be well-defined to avoid conflicts and insure that the students know what is expected of them.

Captain. The Captain should generally be the most experienced or accomplished debater on the team. It is also vitally important that the Captain be hard-working and responsible. Honoring these qualities will cause other members to aspire towards them. The captain is the team's policy debate expert, and her responsibilities could include guiding team strategy and brainstorming sessions, recruiting and training new members, coordinating the team's research, and keeping track of information about judges and other teams.

Secretary. The Secretary must be a student that is mature and reliable. The Secretary is generally the organizational mastermind of the team. She could be responsible for keeping track of press clippings, competitive records, NFL points, and any other non-confidential data gathered about the team. She could also be assigned to record the results of team brainstorming sessions and any other activities requiring a written record.

Treasurer. The Treasurer must be a responsible student who is competent in math. Though she should not be given complete responsibility for team money, she could spearhead fundraising initiatives, track the team's budget, and handle the money at bake sales, car washes, or other events where students are taking in small sums of money and making change.

Community Liaison. The Community Liaison should be charismatic and outgoing, as she will be the public face of the team. She could announce team successes or meeting reminders over the school's intercom, lead recruitment drives, speak at public events, and forge relationships with coaches and debaters from other schools. She could also organize other public relations efforts such as flyers and school signs announcing team accomplishments.

Nuts and Bolts: Record Keeping

There is a large amount of information that coaches will need to keep track of for legal reasons, to make their jobs easier, and to help their teams improve.

Budget. Schools or leagues that provide teams with discretionary funds will want to know exactly how that money is spent. Save receipts, and keep a careful record of where the team's money comes from and where it goes. Some schools and leagues have very specific requirements concerning budgeting, so the coach should check on this at the beginning.

Student Contact Information. Coaches will need to be able to get in touch with students quickly, frequently, and through a variety of media. Collect all home and cell phone numbers, mailing addresses, e-mail addresses, and class schedules so it will be easier to find them during the day. It is also very important to know how to contact the students' parents or guardians, especially in an emergency, so collect that information as well.

Academic Data. Assuming that relevant privacy laws do not prohibit its collection, data concerning students' GPA, standardized test scores, etc. can be very valuable in tracking and demonstrating the educational value of debate. Coaches are advised to check with a supervisor or union representative before collecting this data. Consider asking students to waive their privacy rights so the academic data can be released, especially if the debate team has a GPA requirement for ongoing participation.



Debate History. Keep a record of which students were at which tournaments, who their partners were, who judged them, who they debated, and how they did. Saving old ballots will allow them to track student improvement and identify strengths and weaknesses. If the school is a member of the National Forensics League (NFL), there is a very specific way in which debaters' competitive records must be tracked and reported in order to earn NFL points. Details about how to do this are available from the NFL.



Nuts and Bolts: Record Keeping (cont.)

Backfiles. “Backfiles” are the files that your debate team has accumulated over time that they have used previously. Have a system where you save the backfiles from previous topics because the same arguments may resurface on later topics in slightly different form. This might be a good task to assign to your team Secretary. For example, even if Weapons of Mass Destruction is no longer the topic, nuclear terrorism may continue to be a popular disadvantage impact scenario, and old case attacks could become Affirmative answers. Backfiles also represent countless hours of work on the part of students, who may want to use it later in conjunction with a school research assignment or college application.

Permission Slips. The school will likely require that the debaters receive explicit permission from their parents and/or teachers concerning travel to debate tournaments. Coaches must find out when they are required to collect permission slips and then diligently save these documents.

Emergency Medical Forms. Any time they are off-campus together, the coach bears primary responsibility for the health and well-being of her team. She must know about any medical conditions and have the appropriate forms and medications on hand in case of an emergency. She should also have emergency contact forms for every student.

Supporter Information. The coach will also want to keep records concerning how to get in touch with alumni, community volunteers, judges available for hire, and all other supporters of the team. Keeping a notebook or computer database of this information will allow organized and easy access. In addition to knowing how to contact these people, the coach should maintain a record of what each person is interested in or qualified to do.

3. External Resources and Opportunities

The coach can both make her job easier and maximize debate's benefit to her students by helping them to take advantage of educational resources in their school, league, and community. In particular, the coach can use these resources to compensate for gaps in her own knowledge. For example, if she is not an expert in policy debate she can help her students seek out opportunities to learn from those who are.

Local Seminars

Many urban debate leagues, conscious of the fact that the majority of their coaches are not policy debate gurus, recruit prominent members of the debate community to offer lectures and seminars for the students in the league. Although these cannot substitute for the individualized attention of a trained and accredited educator (the coach), they are an excellent way for students to get exposure to in-depth policy debate theory and argument strategies that their coach cannot offer.

If possible, the coach should attend these seminars as well. This is likely to increase turnout among students both because she will be able to make sure that they go and because her willingness to spend her own valuable time at them communicates the importance of the seminar to the students.

Coaches could also consider offering extra credit to students who attend these optional seminars. After all, they generally entail several hours of learning about reading, speaking, critical thinking, and note taking skills.

Sometimes, leagues also offer seminars or conferences specifically designed for coaches who want to learn more about policy debate and how to teach it. Coaches may even be able to count the time they spend at these seminars towards in-service professional development required by their school, district, or union.

Web Resources

The internet is a valuable tool useful for more than just research. There are a growing number of websites offering educational material about debate and the current debate topic. Coaches can supplement their teaching with these resources:



National Association of Urban Debate Leagues

(<http://www.urbandebate.org/>)

This is the only policy debate site on the internet dedicated exclusively to the needs of students, coaches, and administrators in urban debate leagues. The electronic resource center contains several fully researched files, dozens of research links, tools to help coaches with every aspect of managing a debate team, and information about college, summer institutes, and other opportunities for students.

NDCA Free Workshop Evidence Database (<http://ndca.debateteams.net/>)

The National Debate Coaches Association “NDCA” provides all debate coaches, regardless of type of debate, region or pedagogical style with avenues for professional development, including sample lesson plans. There is a small annual membership fee (\$25). Beginning in 2007 they also have a new comprehensive collection of files from 22 workshops from the past summer that can be downloaded *for free* by any member. This is a way for debate teams to access thousands of pages of evidence, organized by topic. This site also has a starter pack for new coaches, and a PR kit to help sell your program.

University of Vermont’s Debate Central (<http://debate.uvm.edu/default.html>)

Alfred “Tuna” Snider, perhaps the world’s most famous debate coach, has gathered a lifetime of debate wisdom here. His website includes educational resources for students and coaches, information about debate-related opportunities such as scholarships and summer institutes, details about many different kinds of debate, and recorded debates and lectures. Of special interest is his online book, *The Code of the Debater*, which is chock full of valuable advice for learning and improving debate skills.

Michigan States Online Debate Free Encyclopedia (<http://sdiencyclopedia.wikispaces.com/>)

One of the most difficult aspects of learning debate is confronting all the stylized jargon that has developed over many years. In 2007 the Michigan State debate program began the assembly of a comprehensive encyclopedia of debate jargon and concepts. It is free to access and organized alphabetically.



National Forensics League (<http://www.nflonline.org/Main/HomePage>)

Coaches can use this site to find out about upcoming tournaments, submit their team's NFL points online, and find helpful teaching resources. Also, back issues of the NFL's publication, *The Rostrum*, are archived here.

Planet Debate Free Debate Textbook (<http://www.planetdebate.com/>)

Planet Debate is a comprehensive debate website that includes materials about how to debate and a giant database of evidence. It offers a valuable free online textbook ("Policy Debate 101" - <http://planetdebate.com/book/book.asp>) that is available to anyone. The best content on this website, such as regularly updated evidence and recorded lectures from famous debate coaches, is available by subscription only. Available for free, however, are lists of arguments being used around the country, schedules of upcoming tournaments, research links, and more.

National Center for Policy Analysis' Debate Central (<http://www.debate-central.org>)

This is a great place to start a research project. It contains hundreds of links, grouped by topic and by Affirmative/Negative, to articles related to the current resolution. Forums and even a few pre-written briefs are available as well.

Cross-X.Com (<http://www.cross-x.com/>)

Although this is primarily a site that sells evidence, it also contains debate news, chat forums, and some research links. This site does provide information on various workshops from around the country including an opportunity to write questions for the camp directors to answer.

International Debate Education Association (<http://www.idebate.org/main/home.asp>)

IDEA's website contains information about and resources for different kinds of debate. Coaches will find their suggestions for debate exercises and their 'debatabase' of possible debate topics, complete with summaries of the arguments for each side, especially useful. IDEA also sponsors some debate-related educational opportunities such as contests and international seminars.



Summer Workshops for Students

For students interested in taking their involvement with debate to the next level, there is no better way than to attend a summer debate institute. Summer debate institutes, sometimes referred to as 'debate boot camps,' provide students with several weeks of intensive policy debate instruction.

Many urban debate leagues offer in-house institutes for their students at little or no cost. Coaches should urge all of their debaters to take advantage of these opportunities, as they are hands-down the most cost-effective way for students to improve their debating and get to know other students, coaches, judges, and administrators in the league.

Colleges and universities around the country offer more extensive (and expensive) residential programs where students spend two to seven weeks completely immersed in policy debate and the upcoming season's debate topic. Students there work with some of that nation's best college debaters and debate coaches to master debate skills and produce loads of evidence for use during the upcoming season. Attending a residential institute is almost a must for any debaters who want to start competing nationally.

The benefits of a residential debate institute are many: students work with top-notch instructors, receive many rounds of experience on the upcoming topic, and make valuable connections with debaters at other schools and with members of the debate community who may end up judging them. For some students, even the opportunity to leave the city where they live, and experience a college town, is a rare and exciting one.

The major drawback, of course, is the cost of these programs, which are generally in the thousands of dollars. Fortunately, the directors of residential summer debate institutes are often willing to offer financial aid, scholarships, or group rates for urban debaters. The league may have arrangements set up with nearby institutes, or the coach may need to contact the director of the institute herself to ask about scholarships and financial aid.

The NAUDL Online Guide to Summer Workshops

Beginning with Summer 2008 institutes, the NAUDL provides an Online Guide to summer debate workshops that catalogues up-to-date information from participating summer workshops. The Online Guide is accessible at the NAUDL website. It includes general information for each workshop – such as dates, student-faculty ratio, size, etc. It also identifies and highlights those workshops that offer special opportunities (scholarships, faculty, curriculum) for UDL debaters.

Nuts and Bolts: Choosing a Summer Debate Institute

Attending a summer debate institute is a substantial investment of time and money, but the payoff can be huge, too. The potential advantages are not only for the individual students who are able to attend, but also for their coaches and teammates who benefit from the instructional materials and strategies they bring home with them. Coaches, students, and parents should consider the following factors when thinking about summer institutes:

Is it Affordable? For the families of many urban debate league students, cost is the bottom line. Even with substantial scholarships and financial aid, an institute can cost hundreds of dollars. Plus, scholarships rarely cover travel expenses, which can be considerable. In addition to scholarship awards or discounts from the institute the student's league or school may have money available for educational summer programs.

Are there Additional Costs? A few institutes charge students lab fees, make them pay if they want to take evidence home with them, or expect them to pay out-of-pocket for research-related expenses. In many cases these costs are being reduced by the availability of electronic research and evidence processing. In any event costs won't be covered by scholarships or financial aid, so they'll have to be factored in to the consideration of affordability.

Are they UDL-friendly? Some institutes go out of their way to make UDL students feel welcome and appreciated. They understand that UDL students make valuable contributions to their program and they eagerly seek out UDL students for their programs. They often do this



through their hiring practices, their curriculum, their scholarship assistance, and their track record of attracting UDL students. Find out if the workshops you are investigating have hired teachers with UDL experience. Learn how many UDL students have attended the workshop in the past.

Who else is Going? Getting to know the competition and the judging pool is a big benefit of summer institutes. For students who compete only in their UDL, the in-house institute is best for this purpose. Those who compete regionally should find out where the top teams at other nearby schools are going. Those UDL students that compete nationally will be best served by national institutes.



Nuts and Bolts: Choosing a Summer Debate Institute (cont.)

Where is it Located? Institutes in major cities can offer cultural excursions and chances to interact with real-world policymakers but often have to keep a tighter rein on students because of safety concerns. Those in more remote locations offer leisure activities akin to those at a traditional summer camp: swimming, sports, etc., but may be more expensive to get to.

When Will it Take Place? Students with a lot of time on their hands in the summer may want to attend a residential institute that won't conflict with the in-house one that their league offers.

Is it the Right Track? The largest summer institutes offer several tracks based on students' experience, ability level, and prior accomplishments. At some workshops the big name faculty may end up spending most of their time with the top track, so it is important to learn about the details of each track before making a decision.

What is the Focus? Different institutes focus on different skills. Some are known for the quality of research that they produce, others for having top-notch tournaments or renowned lab leaders. By reading between the lines in promotional literature such as brochures or information on the institute's website, savvy consumers can often determine how students will spend most of their time.



Other Leagues and Competitions

Some urban debate leagues are more insular than others. It may be possible for students to spend several years on a debate team and never compete against a team that is not from their league. This has its advantages: urban debate leagues provide a level playing field for schools without big debate budgets and larger coaching staffs to compete against each other.

On the other hand, debaters who participate only in their UDLs are exposed to a narrow variety of debate styles and arguments; they miss out on exciting opportunities to travel and meet new people; and they are unable to engage in great competition such as that found at various state and national championship tournaments. Moreover, debaters may learn more by losing to better teams than by winning against their peers. Finally, there is the danger that such insularity may be perceived as a statement of urban debaters' inability to compete with more affluent schools.

Those teams who have traveled beyond their UDL have often been pleasantly surprised. At other regional tournaments, the competition often is similar in caliber to what they are used to in their leagues. Plus, their school and their program gain prestige in the broader debate community, and their coach gets the chance to meet and swap ideas with more of her colleagues.

Stepping Outside Your League

Coaches interested in taking their teams to competitions outside of their league should consider these national opportunities:

National Forensics League (NFL). Membership in the NFL entails a small fee on the part of the school, but is free for all students at that school. The NFL awards points to students for competing in a variety of forensics activities and grants higher and higher distinctions to students as they accumulate NFL points. Best of all, the NFL sponsors regional tournaments through which debaters can qualify for a weeklong national championship tournament.

National Catholic Forensics League (NCFL). Although the NCFL is organized the diocese of the Catholic Church, it is open to all schools public and private. Membership in the NCFL is usually required to participate in the tournaments they sponsor, but is relatively inexpensive and makes students eligible to participate in regional and national championship tournaments.

Tournament of Champions National Circuit (TOC). The annual TOC held in Lexington, Kentucky is sponsored by the University of Kentucky. The TOC is the only debate circuit that is not organized regionally. Instead, debaters compete at the largest tournaments around the country and earn 'bids' to the TOC by placing highly at these tournaments. Of these leagues, the TOC national circuit is most similar in style to college policy debate, with an orientation towards rapid-fire delivery and complex argumentation. These tournaments attract difficult competition and may be intimidating to teams leaving their league for the first time.



Local Universities

Universities are often looking for ways in which they can have a positive effect on their host communities. While they can and do give back to these communities financially, they generally prefer projects that allow members of their faculty and students to play an active role. Working with a team in a local urban debate league is a great way for them to accomplish all of these goals. If your city has a college or university with a debate program you may want to look to them for helping after school or at tournaments.

UDL debaters can benefit from the involvement of a local university in a number of ways. Members of the college debate team (if there is one) or college students with high school policy debate experience may volunteer as assistant coaches for the school, providing students with another source of policy debate knowledge and the opportunity to learn more about college life. Professors from the university who are experts in the topic area might agree to speak with the team and help them gain a stronger understanding of the arguments they are debating. The school's community relations or public service department might sponsor the team or some of its events.

Perhaps most importantly, however, the university will probably want to recruit members of the high school debate team, especially if it has a team of its own. A debate team typically attracts some of the smartest, most dedicated, and hardest working students at a high school, making it a valuable resource for college recruiters.



High School Debate as a Path to College Admission

There is no doubt that actively participating on a debate team helps students get into college indirectly by improving crucial skills such as reading, critical thinking, oral and written communication, and organization. These skills generally produce higher GPA's and standardized test scores, which are the primary statistic evaluated by college admissions officers.

There are also some very direct ways in which involvement with the debate team can increase a student's chances of getting accepted to and paying for college.

First, debate experience looks good on a transcript. Many college admissions officers say that it is the number one extracurricular activity they look for. Extensive participation on a debate team says many positive things about the student. They chose an academic-oriented extra-curricular activity. They have learned how to research and formulate logical ideas. In short, they have the qualities that admissions departments see as important for likely success in college.

Second, debate experience often gives students the opportunity to interact with university students and faculty. In some cases, this can make college seem like a real possibility for a student who had always believed it wasn't for her. The connections that students make by attending a summer institute, working with a university debate team, or meeting college admissions officers can also be very valuable when is applying. A letter of recommendation from a faculty member or alumnus of a university can make a world of difference in the highly competitive admissions process.

Finally, there are some very well funded college debate teams that go to great lengths to recruit talented high school debaters. Some even make special efforts to recruit urban debate league students. The coaches of these programs can frequently offer scholarships to students who are admitted and may even be able to influence the admissions process.



Talking to Students about College Debate

Many universities with college debate teams offer scholarships that are designated for debaters. Some universities offer awards based on merit and need beyond that – ones that are not tied to the debate team. Participating on the high school debate team helps in being awarded either of these kinds.

Scholarships from university debate teams generally require the recipient to be an active member of the team. College debate can be very enjoyable, educational, and rewarding, but it is not for everyone. It can be very different from debating in an urban debate league, and no student wants to be in the position of being financially dependent on participation in an activity that she does not enjoy.

College debate is more difficult than high school debate in the same sense that college economics classes are more difficult than high school debate classes. College programs often offer full time directors and coaches, which can be a very supportive environment. In the same way that high school debaters tend to stand out in their classes, so do college debaters in their courses.

The most important consideration is that there is dramatic diversity in college debate programs. Students who are interested in a certain type of college program should investigate the characteristics carefully. Coaches should talk to students considering debating in college about the following things:

Time Commitment

Most urban debaters attend one or two practices every week, give up five or six weekends a year for tournaments, and spend two or three weeks at a summer institute. This schedule, though demanding, pales in comparison to that of a nationally competitive college debate team. Team meetings may be longer or more frequent than they were in high school and research assignments are generally more extensive. Tournaments often run Friday-Monday, requiring debaters to miss several days of class. This schedule can make it very difficult for students to participate in other extracurricular activities.

On the other hand, many college programs are sensitive to these demands and offer regional competition with lesser time commitments. The average college debater attends 8-9 tournaments per year, but many attend fewer than that. Most college teams have one weekly meeting in the evening that lasts for an hour or two. Research assignments are generally based on the experience level of the debater and tailored to the time available to the student. Keep in mind that a college student only spends about 15 hours per week actually in class, so there is more time available if the debater is self-disciplined.

Stylistic Differences

College debate is very similar to national circuit high school debate, but quite different from what goes on in many urban debate leagues. Again, there is wide variation in styles that different teams adopt. College debate does tend to be fast, and you will find teams that emphasize policy, teams that emphasize critical arguments, and programs that mix both.

Community Differences

Because all of the teams in an urban debate league tend to go to the same tournaments, summer institutes, and seminars, they often get to know each other very well. Moreover, students regularly encounter coaches and judges whose primary concern is their education. Students from UDLs will find similarities in these areas. The college debate circuit is small enough that you will become friends with debaters from other schools. You will have the same judges several times so you can benefit from that familiarity. College judges also tend to be more experienced so your interaction with them is very educational and supportive.

Members of racial or ethnic minority groups are often in the majority in their UDL. In this regard the college debate community is very much the opposite. Minority groups and women are underrepresented.



4. Professional Development

A coach should view her debate teams not as a hobby or as charity work but as an extension of her career as a teacher. A coach applies the knowledge and skills that she has acquired through her experience as an educator when working with her debaters, and conversely she learns how to employ the methods of debate in the traditional classroom. This chapter will discuss opportunities to develop as a coach, ways in which teachers can professionalize the role of debate coach within their school community, and applications of debate in the classroom.

Learning to Be a Debate Coach

In one sense, it may seem as though there is little to learn about teaching debate. After all, most coaches are already trained as teachers, and who doesn't know how to argue? There is something to this perspective: many teachers become very fine debate coaches despite having little or no formal training.

On the other hand, the profession of debate coach has been around for over one hundred years, and in that time many standards, conventions, and best practices have been developed and shared. New debate coaches who do not pursue opportunities to learn more about the activity and how to teach it are forcing themselves to reinvent the wheel. Even coaches who debated in high school or college years ago will find that much has changed in recent years, leaving them out of touch with the newest developments in debate theory.

The bottom line is that even experienced debate coaches commit themselves to constant education, and this should be doubly true for newcomers to the activity. At the same time, coaches must accept not only that they will they never be experts in debate, but that it will not be long before their students begin surpassing them in terms of knowledge of the topic and experience in debate rounds. Debaters who truly enjoy the activity immerse themselves in it. They spend free time researching, reading files, and thinking about debate. Many give up several weeks of their summer to study at institutes with some of the finest debate minds in the country. Most of all, though, they have the benefit of the best teacher out there: experience.

When it comes to learning about debate, there is simply no substitute for the experience of crafting arguments, testing them out in a round, and learning from one's mistakes. The

excitement of competition drives students to investigate the activity at a depth that a coach generally has neither the time nor the inclination to achieve.

This is nothing to worry about. In fact, it is very healthy. Some of the most successful debate programs in the country rely heavily on experienced students passing on their knowledge to beginners. The coach will have more than enough to do in handling the logistics of the program: running practices, getting the team to tournaments, etc.

Still, coaches do need to learn something about the activity to do their jobs effectively, and fortunately there are a variety of resources available to assist them in this task.

Coaching Colleagues

From the perspective of the coach, one of the most valuable things about an urban debate league is that there is a built-in support network for them. In addition to her league administrators, who make it their business to stay up-to-date on the latest methods of teaching debate, a teacher can also turn to any of the other coaches in the league for help, knowing that they are all educators in similar situations. They all come from the same school system, face similar budget constraints, and work with students who present the common challenges. Chances are good that if one coach is having a problem with something, another coach somewhere else in the league has already had to deal with the same thing and will be ready to share advice and ideas.

Thus, coaches should take advantage of any opportunities for community support that their league makes available. This includes not only official events like coaches' meetings, conferences or training seminars but also informal get-togethers, and particularly in the down-time between rounds at tournaments.

It is in every coach's interest to get to know as many other coaches as possible, but it may prove particularly valuable to seek out an experienced coach with whom one has especially good rapport in order to build a mentoring relationship. Anyone who has been around debate long enough to earn the designation 'experienced' probably loves the activity and will be more than happy to welcome new coaches into the fold. As an added benefit, students on a relatively new team will probably welcome the opportunity to meet and learn from experienced debaters who have been trained by an experienced coach.





Manuals and Textbooks

Because debate has been around for such a long time, a number of works have been published over the years for use by coaches and teachers. These manuals can be very helpful – offering advice, lesson plans, practical suggestions and principles for how to operate your team. You may want to read through several sources of information and choose the parts from each that make the most sense.

Like any other area of academic materials, these vary in quality. They also deal with a vast array of debate formats. Styles and methods for teaching the same format vary greatly with time and location. Most likely, the administration of a coach's urban debate league will provide her with some instructional materials that are most relevant to way things are done in her league. Once again, consulting with other coaches will usually turn up valuable suggestions as well.

The NAUDL Policy Debate Manual

The NAUDL has newly revised its manual titled: "Policy Debate: An Introduction for Urban Debate League Students and Coaches." It can be accessed on the NAUDL website and you can also receive paper copies from your league director. The manual explains the basics of policy debate, details strategies for affirmative and negative debating, and describes the responsibilities and techniques for speaker positions.

University Assistants

Most major cities that are home to urban debate leagues also support one or more university debate teams. In some cities, college programs may even have been the impetus for the league's formation. In any event, there are most likely members of those teams who would be more than willing to assist new coaches with policy debate instruction. Even in cities where there are no college debate programs, there are typically many former debaters who attend local universities. These students may be particularly interested with local high school teams since they do not have college debate program to join. In either case, these assistants can provide valuable expertise on current policy debate practices that not even an experienced coach can rival. Plus, because they are close in age to the students, they can form valuable friendship and mentoring relationships, even serving as role models for students who never thought of themselves as 'college material' before.

Nuts and Bolts: The Limits of University Assistants

The assistance of a current college debater can be invaluable, especially to a beginning coach who does not have any debate experience of her own. Coaches should consider limits to what these assistants can or should be allowed to do, however. Coaches should discuss with the assistant exactly her role and commitment to the team, and then keep an eye out for potential problems.

Lack of Teaching Experience. No matter how good they are at debating, most university assistants have little or no experience as educators. Thus, they may present information too quickly or in ways that is over the heads of or just not relevant to their audiences. Coaches should make sure they are frequently present whenever their university assistant is working with students, both to help her develop more effective teaching practices and to help the students comprehend the material they are learning.

Different Styles. College debate is in many ways very different from the activity as it is practiced in many UDL's, even though the rules are largely the same. University assistants should be helping students to succeed at the style of debate that is used in their UDL, not encouraging them to debate like a college debater. This problem can be nipped in the bud if the coach and the assistant have a conversation about stylistic differences and reach an understanding about what students need to learn.

Busy Schedules. University debaters must balance the usual demands of college coursework with the demands of their own debate careers. If they are frequently traveling to compete on the weekends, they probably spend most of their days catching up on schoolwork. The result is that they may not have as much time as they would like to help out with a high school debate team. Coaches should talk with their assistants at the beginning of the year to work out a reasonable level of commitment that does not interfere with the assistant's schoolwork or debate career. Even with careful planning it is important to note that this schedule may occasionally be disrupted by semester changes and college breaks.

Inappropriate Behavior. Although university assistant may be closer in age to the students than to the coach, they are still bound by the ethical and legal obligations of adult faculty members. They should try to form friendships with members of the team, but this cannot come at the expense of responsible behavior. Romantic or sexual relationships are off-limits, as is the use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs with, in front of, or around the students. It is also important that they understand that they are obligated to report such behavior on the part of the students if they witness it and to report physical or sexual abuse if a student mentions it to them. Be sure that assistants are clear on these ground rules BEFORE they begin working with students; school policy may even require it.



Summer Workshops for Coaches

Many summer institutes that train students in debate also offer programs for coaches. Summer workshops teach the substance matter of the new national topic. They also teach students how to research and conduct practice sessions. In addition to directly learning methods of debate coaching from experienced instructors, these workshops offer a valuable opportunity for coaches to tap into a much wider network of other coaches beyond those in their league. Coaches can learn an incredible amount of information concerning both debate and how to teach it more effectively.

Defraying Costs to Summer Coaching Workshops

Unfortunately, travel, tuition, and lodging at these institutes can be expensive, although those costs vary greatly from location to location. Both the National Forensic League and the National Debate Coaches Association provide financial aid to coaches to attend these workshops. Often if you contact the workshops directly they might be willing to waive all or part of the local costs. Most workshops are eager to have coaches observe their programs, so they will do what they can to work out arrangements. Sometimes, visiting coaches are allowed to earn their keep by assisting the directors of the institute as chaperones or in some other capacity.

Many UDL's offer free training seminars for their coaches and are sometimes able to recruit the same top-notch instructors who are billing out at top-dollar to for-profit summer institutes.

In the end, though, such seminars are valuable professional development opportunities that will benefit both the teacher and her school's debate team, and the school should really be willing to assist with the cost as they would for any other professional development activity. The next section of this chapter will discuss strategies for seeking such professional support from one's school administration.

School Support

Both common sense and a large body of research support the notion that a school is only as strong as its community of teachers. Thus, school administrators have a vested interest in supporting the professional development of the teachers who work for them. This means enhancing the ability of teachers to use the tools and methods already available to them and expanding the range of tools and methods at their disposal. Coaching the debate team can do both of these.

Unfortunately, too many administrators treat the debate team like just another extracurricular activity rather than as an educationally valuable part of the school community. Consequently, many coaches do not receive the support and compensation that they deserve as professional educators.

Ways that Schools Can Support Their Coaches

Providing Stipends. Some leagues provide stipends for their coaches, others leave this up to each school to provide. Coaches who are not being paid for their efforts should begin lobbying the school administration for compensation based on the extra hours she is putting into a school activity. Sports coaches get compensated, as do teachers in summer school and other educational programs that take place outside of the regular school day. Debate is a little of both, so why shouldn't debate coaches get paid?

The local teachers' union may be helpful; teachers' contracts often specify compensation for teachers who work in recognized after-school activities. One strategy in this area would be to get the debate team 'recognized'.

Hiring Assistants. Even if the league provides the coach stipend, it may not provide additional funding for an assistant coach. Funding a stipend for an assistant can be a less expensive way for the school to make a contribution. The school may also be more willing to support the assistant when outside funds support the coach. Most likely, the assistant will need to be another teacher at the school, but sometimes schools will pay others like a local college student who is helping out.

Creating a Debate Class. If a school is not willing or does not have to pay its debate coach, the school may be able to support the coach by allowing the time she spends working with the debate team replace some of her previous teaching duties. For example, the creation of a debate class gives her extra time to accomplish debate teamwork that she otherwise has to do in her free time. A debate class can also broaden the impact and appeal of participating on the debate team to a larger audience of students, which is good for both the school and the team. Plus, when debate is taught as a class, coaches have new leverage to get students to come to practice, compete in tournaments, etc. Some of these may be graded course requirements and other commitments to the team can be rewarded with extra academic credit.



Allowing for a Planning Period. The provision by the school of an extra planning period, during which the coach is not responsible for teaching a class, can give her time to keep up with administrative duties such as tournament registration and support building that she would otherwise have to do after hours.

Paying for Incidentals. Urban debate leagues cut down on the costs of operating a debate team by eliminating the need for tournament registration fees and overnight stays. However, other costs still arise. There are transportation expenses, photocopies and printed briefs to be made, and supplies to buy. These costs can add up when they come out of the coach's pocket. A school that won't contribute money to the team directly may still be able to offset these costs by providing access to school resources such as buses, photocopiers, computers, printers and even the building itself so that the team can host a tournament.

Granting Professional Leave. Schools can minimize the demands that coaching places on a teacher's time and money by giving her paid leave and a reliable substitute teacher for debate-related activities that occur during a regular school day. This would include the time missed to attend tournaments or workshops.

Supporting Professional Development. When coaches invest time and effort into becoming better teachers, the school benefits. The school should support the time commitment by covering the cost and/or counting the time toward professional development requirements of the school district.

Winning support from a school doesn't happen overnight. The coach must develop an advocacy strategy and be persistent, perhaps starting with some of the smaller requests. The most important thing is to keep the successes and benefits of the debate team visible, and to explain how school support is necessary for this great program to be sustainable. The coach's willingness to invest her own time and energy to begin the team should be proof of its value and makes the case for giving her the professional support she deserves.



5. Tournaments

Debate teams typically participate in a variety of events such as public debates, civics education, and community activism. Attending tournaments is the driving force of what it means to be on a debate team. Tournaments bring together all of the students in an urban debate league for friendly competition, community building, and fun. The excitement and intensity of competing at tournaments and the thrill of victory is what motivates most debaters to do the hard work necessary to prepare -- read and re-read their evidence, research new arguments, and practice, practice, practice!

The coach's preparation for tournaments minimizes the stress of participating at the tournament, thereby increasing everyone's enjoyment and education. It will also familiarize coaches with the things that they need to do to keep track of their students at the tournament and to help the tournament administrators keep everything running smoothly.

Tournaments vary greatly with regard both to their length and to the number of teams competing. Some begin and end in a single day, while others span two, three, or even four days. The NFL National Championship tournament lasts an entire week.

Regardless of their size and length, however, most tournaments share common features.

Preliminary Rounds

Debaters compete in teams of two. All teams compete in a set number of preliminary rounds, of which there could be anywhere from three to eight. Teams debate an equal number of rounds on the affirmative side and the negative side. Occasionally a tournament will have an odd number of preliminary rounds, in which case a coin is flipped to randomly assign the side for the last debate. If there are an odd number of teams entered at the tournament, one team each round will get a "Bye". During preliminary rounds, a team cannot be paired against another team from their own school or against a team they have debated in a prior preliminary round.

A judge will be assigned to each preliminary round. She will determine which team wins the round, and she will also give each individual debater speaker points on a scale of 0-30 and rank the debaters from best to worst. Most points are assigned in the range of 25-30. At the end of



the debate the judge records this information on a ballot and returns it to the Tabulation Room (Tab Room), where the tournament administrators keep track of it. Usually, the judge will also talk to the debaters after the round and offer them suggestions for improvement. Depending on the rules of the tournament and her personal preferences, she may or may not disclose her decision.

Pairings in the early preliminary rounds are usually made randomly. These debates are referred to as “preset” rounds. As the tournament progresses the Tab Room begins to match up teams with similar win-loss records. This is referred to as “power matching.” Power matched rounds may either be “high-high” where teams with similar speaker points are paired together, or they may be “high-low” where teams with the highest speaker points (but still with a common win loss record) are paired against those with the lowest.

Elimination Rounds

After the tournament’s preliminary rounds are over, the teams are ranked (“seeded”) in order based on their win loss record. Win-loss ties are broken by consideration of speaker points and possibly speaker ranks. Tournaments vary in the way they break ties and seed teams. After the teams are ranked, a set number of teams advance to the elimination rounds. This is referred to as “clearing” to elimination rounds. Elimination rounds are generally seeded, much like the NCAA basketball tournament. The elimination round team with the best record is paired against the elimination round team with the worst record. These elimination rounds begin a single-elimination part of the tournament.

In elimination rounds, some constraints are dropped. Teams may debate teams they previously faced during preliminary rounds, in which case they will switch sides from the first time they debated at the tournament. Teams can also be paired against other teams from their school. In this circumstance the common practice is that they do not actually debate against each other. Instead, the coach chooses which team advances to the next round. Elimination rounds are usually adjudicated by three-judge panels.

Tournaments conclude with an awards ceremony that recognizes the winning teams and also the individual debaters with the most speaker points.

Nuts and Bolts: A Sample Tournament

Shawn and Terrell from JFK High School attend a two-day tournament with other schools from their league. The tournament begins with two preliminary rounds on Friday afternoon where Shawn and Terrell are randomly paired against two teams from other schools. They cannot debate another team from JFK in preliminary rounds. In their first round, they are on the affirmative and they win. Since they were affirmative in the first round, they are negative in the second, and this time they lose. That night the tournament director recorded the win-loss records, speaker points, and ranks of each team and used this seeding to pair Round 3.

On Saturday, Shawn and Terrell have three more preliminary rounds starting with Round 3, which is power matched high-high. Shawn and Terrell debate the team in the 1-1 bracket with combined speaker points closest to their own. They are randomly assigned to be negative, and they win the round. So they now have a record of 2-1.

Round 4 is power matched high-low, and for the sake of saving time the tournament has decided that results from Round 3 will not be taken into consideration. Round 4 is paired on the results from just the first two rounds. This is called “lag pairing”. Shawn and Terrell debate another team that, after the first two preliminary rounds, had the same record as they did, which was 1-1, but this time the points opposite to Terrell. Since they Round 3, they are 4. Once again, they



Round 5 is power but again for the round is lag paired. were 2-1 after their they will debate was also 2-1 then. Terrell have the

points of any team in the 2-1 bracket they debate the team with the lowest speaker points and were 2-1. As this is the last preliminary round, the teams flip a coin for sides. Shawn and Terrell win the flip, and choose to be affirmative. Unfortunately, they lose the debate.

Now, Shawn and Terrell are 3-2 and they have very high speaker points. There are 22 teams in the tournament, and 8 will advance to the Quarterfinal elimination rounds. There are two teams with a 5-0 record, both of whom advance, as do all 4 of the teams with a 4-1 record from the preliminary rounds. That makes six teams for the 8 elimination round slots. There are 7 teams with 3-2 records and only two of them will advance to the elimination rounds. Those two are chosen based on their speaker points, and Shawn and Terrell have the most points.

team had speaker those of Shawn and were negative in affirmative in Round win.

matched high-low, sake of time the Shawn and Terrell first three rounds, so another team that Because Shawn and highest speaker



Nuts and Bolts: A Sample Tournament (cont.)

Their win-loss record makes them the 7th seeded team, which means they debate the 2nd seeded team in their Quarterfinal round. It turns out this is the same team they lost to in their second preliminary round. Since they were negative in that round, they have to be affirmative this round. Shawn and Terrell pull off an upset against the higher seeded team and therefore advance to the Semifinals. Their opponents are eliminated.

In the Semifinals, they face the 3rd seeded team, who won their Quarterfinal round against the 6th seeded team. This turns out to be another team from JFK, so no debate takes place. Instead, the coach decides that since the other JFK team was seeded 3rd while Shawn and Terrell were seeded 7th, the other team will be the ones to advance. This means that the tournament is over for Shawn and Terrell.

At the awards ceremony they receive a trophy for being a Semifinalist team. Even though they didn't win the tournament, their speaker points were good enough to earn them 3rd and 5th place Speaker Awards – a great showing.



Logistics for Attending a Local Tournament

In addition to everything that must be done to help students prepare their arguments for competition, there are a number of logistical tasks that the coach must complete if the team's tournament experience is to go smoothly:

Arranging for Judging

Most tournaments require a school to provide one judge for every two teams from that school who will be competing. If a school has an odd number of teams, they usually must provide enough additional rounds of judging to cover half of the preliminary rounds at the tournament. In other words, a school registering five teams at a five round tournament would need to provide thirteen rounds of judging: ten to cover their first four teams, and three more to cover their fifth team. If the coach brought two other judges, she might judge three rounds while each of them judged five for a total of thirteen rounds.

Finding Judges

Generally, schools should attempt to provide judges who have some level of knowledge of debate and the topic. Often, though, it is impossible to find enough judges who meet that qualification. Meeting judging obligations can be difficult, especially for large squads. When short on judges, coaches should consider the following options:

Hiring from Tournaments. Some tournaments have a limited pool of judges available for hire by attending schools. However, hired judges get taken up quickly, so coaches should notify the tournament directors immediately - even before they submit their registration - if they desire to hire judges from the tournament. Judges hired through the tournament also tend to be more expensive than those that a coach is able to procure on her own.

Parents of Your Debaters. Parents of team members are not likely to know much about policy debate, and even less about the topic, but they do tend to be ethical and reliable, making them valuable in a pinch. Coaches may be able to convince parents to volunteer their time as a judge by explaining that judging is an essential aspect of the activity their children love so much.

Alumni from Your Team. Former members of the team make excellent judges. Coaches will generally need to compensate them for their time, but they already know something about debate and are often willing to serve double duty as assistant coaches while at the tournament.

Teachers from Your School. A coach may be able to entice a few of her colleagues to come see what a debate tournament is all about and to help out with judging while they're at it. This can also be a good way to get teachers more aware of and involved in the debate team at their school, so that eventually they can help out as assistant coaches or in some other capacity.



Despite great efforts, sometimes the only way for a school to cover their judging commitment is for the coach to judge. Some coaches find judging to be a chore. While judging may not always be the most pleasant use of time, it is a necessary one, however, to help stay up-to-date on the current topic and the latest trends in argumentation. While a coach should try to leave herself some rounds off to watch her debaters, she should also try to judge a few rounds at every tournament in order to develop and maintain her debate skills.

Registering Entries

The coach must provide the tournament directors with all necessary entry information before the registration deadline. Generally, this will include the coach's name and contact information, the name of the school, the full names of both students on each team, and the names of the team's judges.

Many tournaments offer multiple divisions in which students may compete, such as Novice, Junior Varsity, Open, and/or Varsity. The eligibility requirements for these divisions vary by tournament, so coaches should check with the tournament administration about this. For tournaments with multiple divisions coaches must indicate the divisions in which they are registering each team and judge.

Notification of Parents and School

The main office and the parents or guardians of all students who will be competing need to know details about the tournament: where it is, what days it will take place, and how long students will be there. If students have to miss classes, they will also need to get permission from their teachers. The coach should collect and file away all permission slips from parents or guardians and from teachers.

Transportation to the Tournament

If the size of the team warrants, chartering a bus is the easiest way to transport students. Two coaches from neighboring schools might want to cut costs by sharing a bus if their teams are attending the same tournament. Be familiar with the school's policy on transportation before taking students on public transportation or private vehicles.

Coaches are advised to have their teams travel as a group. This may entail having everyone meet at the school or another central location before leaving, but it avoids the confusion and unreliability of requiring students to arrange their own transportation. Coaches who do allow students to travel separately should be sure they are able to communicate by cell phone in case of lateness, emergency, etc.



Feeding the Debaters

Not all tournaments provide all meals for competitors, so coaches may need to make arrangements to get food for the debaters and judges from their school. Tournaments will schedule a lunch break during the day, and most tournaments will at provide a list of nearby restaurants that offer takeout, delivery, etc. You may want to assign an Assistant coach or parent to go bring lunch back for the debaters.

Expectations for Debater Behavior at Tournaments

Expectations should be established before the first tournament, but they are valuable enough to review frequently. Discuss appropriate tournament conduct with their debaters. This includes arriving on time for rounds; treating teammates, partners, opponents and judges with respect; dressing appropriately; taking notes and politely asking questions during judge critiques; and checking in with the coach at pre-arranged times and places during the day, lunch, for instance. Reinforce other expectations as well, for example that debaters will try their best in every round no matter how overwhelmed or helpless they feel.

Confirmation of Entry

Check-in with the debaters the day before the tournament to remind them about their commitment, the time and logistics of departure, and to confirm that they are still able to attend. This also gives the students an opportunity to ask any last-minute questions they may have. If a student and/or team drops out of the tournament, notify the tournament immediately so they can change the pairings and adjust other planning.

Make Changes to Registration

Upon arriving at the tournament, confirm that all of the debaters are present. If anyone is missing, advise the Tab Room immediately so that they can alter the registration and pairings accordingly. Depending on the tournament, additions of new debaters and reconfigurations of teams may or may not be allowed. If they are, the coach should advise the Tab Room of these changes immediately as well.

Nuts and Bolts: Choosing Among Teams on the Squad

Occasionally, coaches are forced to make very difficult decisions that will award a privilege or opportunity to one of their teams at the expense of another one. For instance, tournament policy, budget limitations, or a lack of judges may limit the number of teams that each school can register. Or, a coach might be required to choose which debaters will advance when two of the school's teams hit each other in an elimination round. Consider the following criteria when making these agonizing decisions:

Attendance and Effort. Students who regularly attend practices, show up for optional seminars, and otherwise invest a lot of time and energy into debate ought to be rewarded above those who have made less of a commitment. Such a policy may disadvantage debaters with competing work or family obligations, commitments that occasionally cause them to miss team events. These students may nonetheless be putting their best effort into the activity.

Seniority. Some coaches feel that students who have been on the team the longest have earned the first chance at competitive opportunities. Seniors in particular will not have a chance to go to the same tournament next year. The criterion of seniority has the advantage of contributing to a team culture that values perseverance and being 'in it for the long haul'. On the other hand, if younger students consistently miss out on opportunities they may grow dissatisfied with the activity or be less competitive when it is finally their turn.

Competitiveness. Some coaches may choose to maximize the school's chances of bringing home awards by entering or advancing the team with the best record to or the one that she simply feels has the best shot at winning that round or tournament. Coaches should be careful of encouraging an ultra-competitive win-at-all-costs mentality on their teams and of denying less experienced debaters opportunities to improve so that the team will remain strong.

Equal Opportunity. On some squads, every debater gets the chance to compete in the same number of tournaments. This has the advantage of minimizing team rivalries and emphasizing the fun and educational value of debate over the competitive element. But it may be the case that students who regularly skip practice do not deserve the same opportunities as those who exhibit uncommon dedication and reliability.

In any event, coaches should always keep an eye out for ways in which whatever criteria they use may inadvertently discriminate based on gender, culture, income or some other factor. For example, religious obligations may occasionally cause students to miss practice or other events, and this should of course not be held against them.

Whichever criteria the coach ultimately chooses to employ, she should make the policy clear to her debaters ahead of time and apply it consistently otherwise the coach will be accused of favoritism. If the rule is established ahead of time and well known to everyone, then the decision will be accepted as legitimate and there will be no hard feelings.

Networking

Tournaments are in many ways a coach's best opportunity to meet and build relationships with other members of her local debate community. Most UDL's have occasional coaches meetings, but tournaments are often the best chance a coach has to meet debaters and judges from schools other than her own, and there are several reasons why she will want to make these connections.

Establishing good relationships with judges who appear at tournaments regularly is valuable for both competitive and educational reasons. A coach who knows the local judging pool can help her students adapt their arguments and strategies to their judge each round. Perhaps more importantly, a coach who is friendly with the judge will have an easier time discussing with her after the round about how the debaters performed and how they can improve.

Meeting other coaches and debaters is helpful, too. Teams that are strapped for resources may be able to share evidence, transportation, or scouting information about other teams and judges. Coaches with a good working relationship might want to bring their teams together for some informal scrimmaging. Finally, coaches can share ideas and more experienced coaches can serve as mentors for new arrivals.



Observing Rounds

Sometimes, a school is so short on judges that the coach must judge every round to meet the team's obligations. Other times, other schools will be short on judges and the tournament directors may ask the coach to help out by judging so that other schools will not have to drop teams. Be willing to cooperate in these circumstances because it keeps the tournament running smoothly, and would most likely expect reciprocal action from other coaches were the circumstances reversed.

When possible, however, try to arrange to have a few rounds off to watch the teams from their own schools compete. This will help in receiving the most accurate assessment of their students' abilities, as debaters may behave very differently in high-pressure situations than they do during practice rounds.

Proper Etiquette for Observing

Coaches should always check with the judge and the other team in the round to be sure that neither objects to having an observer. They shouldn't, but if they do that is their prerogative and the coach must respect it. The coach should also be sure that she is not making her own team too nervous or uncomfortable by observing them. The pedagogical value of observing their rounds is high enough that the coach can expect the debaters to get over a small amount of insecurity, but in circumstances where she is truly disrupting their ability to focus on the round, she should respect their wishes.

When observing rounds, coaches should not under any circumstances help or give the appearance of helping their debaters, as this could lead to their being asked to leave or their team being forced to forfeit. Make a conscious effort not to communicate anything to students via body language (i.e. not making faces at bad arguments or gesturing when the speaker has spent too long on one point), and do not speak to the students, even if it is during the other team's prep time and completely unrelated to the round.

Finally, the coach should model appropriate behavior for her students during the judge's oral critique. This means listening carefully and taking notes, asking politely for constructive criticism, and NEVER arguing. No matter how wrong it may seem the judge might be, she is not going to change her decision once she has made it. It is also impossible to learn from the judge and the shared experience of the debate if the goal is to convince the judge is wrong. It is exactly in those debates where it is most inconceivable why the judge voted the other way that one needs to understand why the judge perceived the round so differently.

Through observing the round, coaches will no doubt accumulate a number of comments they want to make to their students. Resist the temptation to share them immediately. This is when debaters are least receptive to criticism. Rather, instruct them to save their flows so that they can

discuss both her comments and the judge's at their next meeting or later in the tournament. For example, if the coach has some comments about the team's performance on the affirmative, hold off until the next time the team is affirmative and work the comments in as constructive suggestions for how the team should approach the next debate.

Keeping Things Running Smoothly at Tournaments

Always know where the students are during a tournament, both for piece of mind and also to be able to find them to inform them of a room or judge change or just to be sure that the team arrives to their rounds on time. Of course, keeping track of ten or more students spread out across a school is no simple task. The trick is to make sure students always know where they are supposed to be.

Most of the debaters' time at a tournament will be spent in their rounds. The coach can always figure out which room their teams are in by checking the tournament pairings. As soon as pairings come out, students should go to their assigned rooms to prepare. This way, they will never be late, and their coach will be able to find them if she needs to give them important last minute information or just wants to discuss their strategy for the upcoming round.



Upon arriving at a tournament, coaches should discuss with their students a place where everyone will meet between rounds, at the end of the day, etc. Generally, tournament hosts will provide a common room for students to assemble, and this is the best place for teams to plan to meet up. When a team has a bye, they should also go to this central meeting place. Typically they will not be allowed to watch other rounds while they are still entered in the tournament.

If some teams are in elimination rounds and others are not, the coach should take a few minutes to assign a task to each of her debaters who are finished competing. They should either watch one of their teammates' rounds in order to lend their support. This should be moral support only, of course - debaters should not help or give even the appearance of actual assistance to their teammates during a round.

Non-clearing debaters could be assigned to scout another round to gather intelligence about a school that their teammates might hit in their next elimination round or at a subsequent tournament. In addition to helping teammates who are still competing, watching rounds also improves the skills of the observing students. Require your scouts to flow debates and debrief them about these rounds later, asking questions about what they saw – ex. discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the teams they observed. Teams in elimination rounds are generally the best ones at the tournament, so debaters can learn a lot by studying them.



After the Tournament

Debaters who win awards will probably want to take them home to share with family and friends. Coaches should encourage this, as it both motivates the students and demonstrates the value of the debate team to their families. However, coaches may want to ask students to bring their trophies to the next meeting so that they can be displayed prominently in the school. They should be returned at the end of the year or when the debater graduates, but until then they can serve as important promotional tools for the team. A full trophy case is a great way to attract positive attention from teachers, students, and administrators at the school.

Collect the ballots that judges write from the previous tournament and read through them. Take notes of any comments you want to discuss with the debaters. While coaches can and should share these with students, who will be eager to see how they did and why in each round, it is important that the debaters return them so that they can be kept on file. The first team meeting after the tournament should be a debriefing session where the team discusses comments from judges, the coach's observations if she got the chance to watch any rounds, and new arguments that were heard.

This conversation is more valuable a few days after a tournament rather than a immediately afterward because the increased distance will make students more receptive to criticisms about their performances. Immediately after competing, debaters are still in 'debate mode' and accustomed to fending off criticisms of their arguments, as this is what they have been doing all day. Team Meetings offer an appropriate forum for constructive criticism.



Logistics for Attending Out of Town Tournaments

Urban debate leagues provide a very valuable service by creating numerous opportunities for relatively nearby competition in their city. This makes it cheap and easy to attend tournaments and develop a broad-based program. There are other debate tournaments, however, that draw a regional or national audience. Examples of this are national circuit tournaments, UDL regional championships, or state and national championships. At these events the debaters will face their stiffest competition and be eligible to win significant accolades. Overnight travel is a greater challenge for coaches as well who will face stricter school regulations and greater responsibility.

Registration

Registration is often due considerably further in advance for large tournaments, and accuracy is more important. Whereas a UDL tournament will probably have the flexibility to allow coaches to drop teams on the day of the tournament without penalty, larger tournaments may keep a substantial portion of the team's registration as a drop fee. Many of the larger tournaments to which UDL teams travel require students to qualify, as for a national championship event, or be invited, as for the Barkley Forum at Emory University.

Finding Judging

Meeting judge obligations for large tournaments can be extra difficult for a variety of reasons. For one thing, national circuit tournaments will generally require judges with more experience with policy debate than is possessed by parents or community volunteers the coach can draw from for local tournaments. National championship tournaments often have panels of judges even in preliminary rounds, which means that the judging obligation may be one or one and a half judges per team rather than the usual one. Finally, the coach must find judges willing to travel and give up an extended weekend in order to help out. At the very least, this will probably require a much larger stipend.

School and Parent Notification

Parents, teachers, and the school administration will need to be informed well in advance of out of town events, and their permission may be harder to obtain. In addition to the usual information, they will also need to know how the team will be traveling and the phone number of the hotel where the team will be staying. Additionally, coaches or students should remain in touch with parents throughout the trip. Coaches should make sure they have emergency medical information, medicines, etc.

Transportation

Schools and school districts will likely have strict requirements concerning how students may travel out of town. The coach will need to be familiar with these guidelines. When traveling by



plane, it is wise to arrive at the airport at least two hours in advance of the scheduled departure time as it generally takes longer to get a large group checked in for a flight and through security. One other unique aspect of flying to a tournament is the luggage limitation. Typically airlines only allow two pieces of luggage per person. Bins of evidence must be securely packaged so that they will not come open on the plane as they are being loaded. When traveling to an unfamiliar locale, coaches should be sure to have directions and maps and to leave extra time for getting lost.

Housing

Hosts of some national circuit tournaments provide a limited amount of housing for out of town competitors looking to cut costs. Generally, this involves staying with the family of a member of that school's debate team. The coach will still need a place to sleep, and if her debaters are at another location she will need to know how to get in touch with them. If the entire team is staying in the hotel, students should never share a room with adult chaperones, including the coach, nor should male and female students share rooms. Consider blocking student rooms from ordering movies, room service, etc. Setting an alarm and a wake-up call is the best way to avoid oversleeping - nothing ruins a travel tournament like going through all that effort just to sleep through an important round.

Chaperones

Check with their principal to find out what the school's policy concerning chaperones is. Even if she is able to cover the team's judging obligations herself, a coach may still be required to bring along a teacher or parent to assist with chaperoning. Extra supervision is necessary to ensure that no unauthorized room sharing is going on. The coach's goal should be to return from the trip with as many people as she left with: no less, and no more!

Food

Advise students to bring spending money with them to cover incidental expenses such as food. Some tournaments provide food during the tournament and this should be factored in to the suggested amount for students to bring with them.

Behavior Expectations

Coaches must be crystal clear about appropriate behavior during the trip. These rules may be provided by the school, but will most likely include staying with a chaperone at all times, not leaving their rooms after a certain hour, avoiding alcohol or drug consumption etc.

6. Public Debates

The policy debate rounds that your students participate in at tournaments are often highly technical and complex, which makes them fun, interesting, and educational for properly trained participants. Unfortunately, these qualities make them not very inviting or even coherent to the uninitiated. Parents, principals, and other supporters of the team are likely to be very interested in seeing students engaged in debate, but may find the average tournament round to be overwhelming.

Public debates are a way for students to showcase their skills in an audience-friendly forum and discuss issues of immediate importance to them and their communities. They can be a valuable tool for forging partnerships with new organizations, exposing the benefits of debate to a wider audience, recruiting new team members, and maybe even effecting political change.



The best way to plan, organize, and execute a public debate depends on which of these goals it is intended to advance. The one thing that all public debates have in common, however, is that it takes time and energy to produce a success. Allowing plenty of time to prepare for them and sharing responsibilities across a wide spectrum of individuals (coaches, students, parents, partner organizations, etc.) is the best way to make the many necessary tasks manageable.

This chapter will discuss how the goal or goals of a public debate determine its elements: structure, time, location, topic, participants, and audience.



Public Debates Designed to Forge Partnerships

Supporters of a debate program will most likely want to be involved in some way. Unfortunately, if they aren't qualified or available to judge, a schedule dominated by debate tournaments doesn't give them many opportunities to offer their help in a meaningful way. If a debate squad hosts a public debate supporters can be invited to participate as moderators, speakers, hosts, or audience members. By partnering with a local interest group, debaters get the chance to meet, interact, and learn from real world policy advocates. Plus, these partners are more likely to become vocal supporters of the team if they feel they have played an active role in the team's activities.

Structure and Format

If the main purpose of the public debate is to give partner organizations an opportunity to interact with students, then the debate should be structured to maximize their involvement. This could be accomplished in a number of debate formats:

Students vs. Experts. Students pit their superior debating skills against members of a local interest group who will most likely have superior knowledge of the topic.

Students/Experts vs. Students/Experts. Members of two interest groups with opposing agendas, for example pro-immigration and anti-immigration, team up with students. Generally, the experts from each team should present the first speech that lays out their team's basic case, and the last speech that ties up everything that has happened in the round and makes a final appeal. The students can best showcase their debating skills by refuting each other's arguments in the speeches in the middle of the round, relying on the facts presented by their expert partners to support their claims.

Experts vs. Experts (Student Panel). Two or more guest speakers with opposing views present opening arguments, are questioned by a panel of students, and then present closing arguments. The audience could be encouraged to ask questions as well.

Students vs. Students (Expert Panel). Students present opening arguments, are questioned by a panel of experts, and then present closing arguments. Again, audience questions could be solicited as well. This format works best when the partnership organization or debate co-sponsors are not an advocacy organization. Instead, they use their knowledge of the topic to focus the arguments of the student debaters and encourage them to delve more deeply into the issues.



Time and Location

This should be determined largely by the organization(s) the team is working with. The more high profile the guest speakers, the further in advance they will need to be booked. Given the amount of preparation students may need to do for this sort of event, it may be best to schedule it before or after the team's competitive season so that it won't conflict with time they spend preparing for tournaments.

Topic

When the primary purpose of the public debate is to work with a particular organization, the broad topic area (i.e. crime, education, immigration, etc.) should be one with which that group is concerned.

While they should certainly be invited to assist in narrowing the topic to a specific resolution, there are other things to consider as well. A controversial question will probably attract a larger audience, but if it is too personal or emotional it could actually turn people off to the team. The debate will have more of an impact if the topic is one on which audience members are not likely to hold immutable opinions. For example, the question of whether abortion ought to be legal is one on which very few people are open to persuasion. A public debate could explore the same themes by discussing stem cell research, another controversial topic but one on which people are generally less informed and hence less intractable. A more complex topic also gives the guest experts from the co-sponsoring organization a chance to play a more critical role, as the information and evidence they can share will be of heightened importance.

Participants

Members of the partner organization(s) should be as involved as possible at all levels of the debate. Depending on their interest, they could assist students in researching the topic and preparing their arguments or questions, give an informational talk before or after the debate, participate as speakers in the actual debate, or serve as moderators, panel members or judges.

Student participants should be chosen for how well they will reflect on the team. Anyone willing to put in the time and effort to prepare adequately would be a good candidate, but those who take a special interest in learning about the topic will probably be most appealing to the partner organization, as they will appreciate the opportunity to educate high school students about the issues that are important to them.



Audience

Having a co-sponsor provides something of a built-in audience for a public debate. Most likely, the partner organization(s) will have mailing lists and other organized ways of communicating with their members and supporters that they can use to publicize their involvement with a debate team.

This audience can be supplemented by the debate team's supporters, who will likely be very impressed by the sight of students debating alongside public policy professionals. Coaches should extend personal invitations to principals, school administrators, and others to whom she wants to dramatize the educational value of debate. This is especially true for supporters who have expressed an interest in seeing a debate, as a public debate may be much more interesting and accessible to them than a round at a tournament.

This format of public debate is not the best for recruitment, however. While some students might be intrigued by the prospect of interacting with adult professionals, especially if they have name recognition, this format could actually reinforce stereotypes about debate that are keeping students away, for example that debate is only for especially smart students or that one must possess extensive knowledge of the topic area to join the team.



Public Debates Designed to Widen Audiences

Highly competitive and technical debate tournaments are not for everyone. Those who enjoy the activity enough to learn its ins and outs reap considerable rewards, but this is rarely more than a small fraction of the school community. Few parents, teachers, school administrators, and community supporters have the time or interest to learn enough about debate to truly appreciate its benefits. As their name suggests, public debates are designed for a wider audience than the relatively small number of people who can appreciate the average debate round. A debate team can organize and host a public debate to show off their skills in a highly audience-friendly format. This can be a great way to attract interest from supporters who might be confused by a traditional debate round.

Structure and Format

The key here is simplicity. Each speech and the round as a whole should be relatively short, so that supporters with busy schedules will be able to see the entire thing from beginning to end, and those without debate experience will be able to follow the progression of the round with ease.

More important than the length and number of speeches, however, is their style. Debaters must avoid jargon, speed-talking, heavy reliance on evidence, and other conventions of policy debate that do not translate well into a public forum. This event should have a feel similar to televised presidential debates, which are geared towards a highly diverse audience, many of whom have only limited knowledge of the topics being discussed.

A portion of the debate can be reserved at the end for audience comments and questions.

Time and Location

The event should be scheduled for a time and place that will be most convenient for the intended audience. If the debate is intended primarily for teachers, students, and administrators in the school community, then scheduling it immediately after school or even an assembly during regular hours would be most appropriate. If it is designed to appeal to parents and community supporters, then weekends and evenings are usually a better time.

Topic

The topic, like the structure, must be something simple to understand and of interest to a variety of people who are not debate experts. This could be a pressing national controversy such as the death penalty or an issue of local concern. When appealing primarily to the school community, a debate topic concerning a new school policy could be appropriate. However, if the architect of the policy (such as the principal) is going to be present, she may not appreciate a debate in which students voice strong criticisms of it.



Participants

Students should practice debating for a lay audience several times in order to get used to speaking at a conversational pace, avoiding jargon, and making use of the flowery rhetoric that many people expect from a public speaker.

Carefully consider using this event to give a variety of members of the team a chance to shine. Those who have not yet mastered the technicalities of policy debate necessary for success at tournaments won't have to worry about unlearning them and may appreciate a forum where their more natural style will be appreciated. This is an especially valuable opportunity to involved students who are frustrated with or just not all that interested in tournament debating. Public debates can expand the ways in which students can have meaningful involvement in the team's activities.

Finally, teachers and administrators may actually be more impressed to see a normally shy or academically challenged student speaking in public than to see an outgoing honors student with a 4.0 GPA. It may mean a lot to the student, as well, to be the subject of positive attention among her teachers for once.

Audience

The intended audience is already known, so the key is how to attract as many of them as possible. Giving notice several weeks in advance will help supporters with busy schedules set aside the time to attend, as will choosing a convenient location and an interesting topic. The event can also attract new supporters if it is advertised via the school newspaper, PTA meetings, and even a listing in a community newspaper or newsletter. Such advertising should make clear that this event is intended to both entertaining and educational for a broad audience that is interested in finding out what a high school debate team is all about. Flyers that encourage the audience to "come see your school's city champion debaters discuss..." typically succeed.



Public Debated Designed to Increase Recruitment

When it comes to building student interest in a debate team and recruiting new members, there is no substitute for seeing the real thing. As much as potential recruits will want to know about the benefits of debate for their schoolwork, their personal development, and their college opportunities, they will also want to know what exactly they'll be doing and see their peers doing it. Many will not be willing to give up an entire Saturday to come observe at a tournament, and probably find the experience overwhelming anyway. Instead, teams can design a special public debate to introduce the activity.

Structure

The format of this debate should mirror that of a tournament round, albeit one that would be interesting and accessible to a novice. Speeches might be shortened to fit the debate into a specific time period, say a class or after-school session.

An audience of potential recruits will be looking for a realistic portrayal of a debate round that will help them to decide whether the activity is right for them. While speed reading and jargon should be de-emphasized so as not to make it seem too inaccessible, teams should stick as closely as possible to the arguments and format that they would use in an actual round. That means teams of two, with each student giving one constructive and one rebuttal speech. If time allows, these should be eight and five minutes in length, just like in a regular round. It may be helpful if team members who are not debating give a quick summary of what happened in each speech, perhaps during prep time, to help the audience can keep up.

While the audience is captive, the team should take the opportunity before or after the round to talk about the benefits of debate and the structure of the team. After the demonstration, they should allow time for questions about how debate works or what will be required of team members. As much as possible, students on the team rather than the coach should handle this, as their peers will probably be receptive to such information when it comes from them compared to when it comes from a teacher.

Time and Location

This is a great activity for an after-school Informational Meeting. It should take place immediately after last period, before prospective audience members have left the building. They are more likely to stick around to watch a debate than they are to go home and come back later in the evening. The event should be scheduled to avoid meetings of similar extra-curricular activities that interested students might already be involved in.



Topic

For a more realistic debate, the topic should be drawn from the current year's resolution and involve actual arguments that the team commonly uses. On the other hand, it may be possible to increase attendance and broaden the appeal of debate by focusing instead on a topic that would be of interest to other students at the school, such as a controversial new school policy.

Participants

This public debate should feature the students who are most passionate about the activity, usually those who have been on the team the longest. They will convey enthusiasm in their speeches and make debate seem more appealing. These may or may not be the members who have had the most competitive success.

If there is time and interest, coaches might want to give the audience a chance to give their opinions on the topic that was debated after the round. This is a good way to draw the potential recruits in and help them experience first-hand the fun and excitement of debate.

Audience

The primary audience will be other students at the school. The coach should encourage both team members and her colleagues to talk up the event to friends and classmates as potential recruits will be most likely to come if asked by a friend or well-respected teacher. The team can also build hype by hanging fliers and making announcements on the intercom. Giving students notice is helpful, but they frequently do not plan their time well in advance so it is important to give frequent reminders in the final days before the event. Food is a must as there will be plenty of hungry students after school, and getting teachers to offer extra credit in their classes can be a draw as well.

Public Debates Designed for Political Change

Many students join debate because they are interested in becoming policymakers later in life, and others choose to enter such careers as a result of their debate experience. However, debaters do not have to wait to begin using their skills to make a difference. Debate is a tool that can empower students to make their voices heard and start working for change in their communities right away. Public debates can be a very effective and satisfying way to raise awareness about an issue and communicate student opinion on matters that affect their lives.

Structure and Format

This can vary greatly depending on the nature of the event and the intended audience. It is unlikely but not impossible that when the team is in agreement about their stance on a particular issue, they will have the opportunity to debate policymakers or members of interest groups who endorse the opposite stance. When a controversial proposal threatens to impact students' lives in an immediate and negative way (for example, if the school board is considering decreasing funding for or closing their school), they may be able to call attention to it by challenging its advocates to a public debate. Even if the challenge is not accepted, the offer itself might attract attention from local media and result in bad publicity for the relevant authorities.

Students should be careful what they wish for, though. If their challenge is accepted and they are not fully prepared to defend their position, they could end up doing more harm than good to their cause. Coaches must also take political sensitivities into account. While the goal is to ruffle feathers, pushing the issue too hard could potentially threaten jobs or get students into trouble at school. A less risky approach would be to arrange for a public debate on the issue and invite community members, local politicians, and the media to come hear what students have to say on both sides of the issue. This can be a powerful way to call attention to a problem or issue and get student input taken consideration.

If this is the route that the team takes, they must fairly represent both sides of the issue, even if they are in agreement that one is more correct than the other. The underlying philosophy of debate is that truth emerges from a rigorous clash of opposing viewpoints. Not only would a mock-up debate where one side is made to look overly weak or foolish not raise the quality of public discourse on the issue, it might also damage the reputation of the student debaters, their team, and the activity in general.





Finally, teams may be able to arrange for an impromptu discussion of an important issue in a public venue such as a park or marketplace. First, they need to find a location. They may need to get a permit or other special permission, or they may be able just to get up on a soapbox and start talking. In any event, they should first try to get as many other students as they can to come show support by building an audience or even speaking. Then, they just take turns speaking their minds to whoever stops to listen. Everyone should take turns speaking, and they can even encourage passers-by to get in on the action.

Time and Location

The event should be scheduled for a public place in the community affected by the issue at hand. If the goal is to attract media attention, the team will need to choose a location where cameras and microphones can be setup with ease. They should choose a time when a large number of people will be gathered in their chosen location, such as lunchtime or weekend afternoons.

Topic

The topic should be a general discussion of the pros and cons of the policy or issue at hand. The broader it is, the more opportunities there will be for students to voice their opinions, which is one of the central goals. Remember it is important that all sides of the issue should be represented fairly.

Participants

Since the central purpose is to make student voices heard on issues that are important to them, every student should be given the opportunity to speak. Even those who are not members of the team can be invited to share their opinions. When there is a general consensus on an issue, it may be necessary for some students to represent the other side even if they don't believe in it themselves. The ability to see all sides of an issue, even those of one's opponent, is a valuable skill that students learn from debate. Given the challenge inherent in this task, the most experienced and accomplished debaters should be the ones to undertake it.

It is also worth trying to find genuine representatives of opposing views. If the policymakers advocating them cannot or will not fill this role themselves, teams should make an effort to find representatives of interest groups that share these positions. In an impromptu discussion in a public arena, this could mean simply turning over the floor to an opinionated passer-by who wishes to speak her mind. Students should be respectful of these speakers, even if they disagree vehemently with them.



Audience

When the purpose of the public debate is to raise awareness and create change the audience should be as wide and diverse as possible. Send a press release to local media outlets and invite local policymakers to come hear students speak out. Also advertise the results of the debate (number of participants, for example) back at the school after it has occurred. Advertising may be of some help in attracting the attention of the community at large, but the best way is simply to draw in passers-by by choosing a popular location and delivering impassioned speeches that make people want to stop and listen. Debate was once a popular spectator sport in this country, and this kind of public debate is a way to tap into that legacy.

COACHING THE BASICS: WHAT IS AN ARGUMENT?

Some people think that “engaging in argument” means being mad at someone. That’s one use of the word “argument.” In debate we use a far different meaning of the term. In some ways though, making an argument in debate is the opposite of being mad at someone. It means making claims based on logical reasoning and proof.

There are three parts to an argument in debate: the claim, the data, and the warrant. These terms seem kind of formal, and they are. But whether you know it or not, solid arguments that you make every day are based on these concepts.

Here is an example of an argument: “Team X will win the basketball game against Team Y because Team X has taller players than Team Y.”

The “**claim**” is the bottom line conclusion of the argument – namely in this example that “Team X will win the basketball game.” The “**warrant**” is the reasoning behind the claim. In this example the reasoning is that the taller team will win the basketball game. The “**data**” are the facts used to support the warrant. In this example the data is that Team X is taller than Team Y.

Here is another example of an argument. “The death penalty should be abolished because innocent people are killed.” The claim is that “the death penalty should be abolished.” The warrant is that any policy that results in innocent people being killed should be ended. The data is that innocent people are killed by the death penalty.

Claims without reasoning are very weak arguments. Some might say it isn’t even an argument at all. The more warrants, or reasoning, that a claim has the stronger it is generally speaking. Sometimes the data might be statistics sometimes it might be an expert opinion.

For example, the argument “I saw that movie got ‘two thumbs up’ so we should go and see it” uses the expert opinion as the data for the claim. The claim is that we should go see the movie. The warrant is that movies that receive two thumbs up are worth seeing. The data would be that the movie did, in fact, receive a review of “two thumbs up.” This reasoning is based on an appeal to the expertise of the reviewers, and little more.

So, that’s an argument. Claim-Warrant-Data. Debate is based on competing arguments. Each team offers arguments that they defend, and they attack the arguments of their opponents. Research provides the data and warrants for defending and attacking arguments.

There are many ways to attack an argument. You could challenge the factual basis of the claim. In the first example, perhaps Team Y was in fact taller than Team X. In the second example you could prove that there has never been an innocent person executed in the U.S.

Another way to go would be to attack the reasoning/warrant. In the first example you could point out that the taller team does not always win basketball games. You could find examples of games that were not won by the taller team. You could say that other factors such as shooting ability, experience, effort, and coaching might be equally or more important factors in winning.

In the second example you could argue that just because an innocent person might be killed is not sufficient reason to ban a public policy. For example, innocent people die in traffic accidents, does that mean we should ban driving automobiles?

COACHING: WINNING CLASH BATTLES

Every debate turns on a handful of arguments where both sides have a valid point. Usually, most of the time spent in the debate falls in these areas. To be a champion debater you must learn how to win these crucial “clash battles.” There is a reliable, five-step extension technique that you can use to help you win clash battles. The 5 steps are:

(1) Refer back to the tag of your argument. This step is where you indicate to the judge what argument you want to extend. Make a specific reference to an earlier speech by your team where the argument was initiated. This could include a piece of evidence. This technique is often called “signposting.”

(2) Explain your argument. In this stage you comprehensively explain your argument. This step may take one sentence or several, depending on the time pressure in the speech and the importance of the argument. Explanations should include a statement of the underlying reasoning and proof for your claim.

(3) Characterize your opponent’s response to your argument. Your description should be fair. Do not be critical of the other side’s argument. Don’t call it “stupid” or “silly”. You will lose credibility with the judge if you do that. This part should also be brief, but you do want to develop an understanding in the judge’s mind.

(4) Resolve the issue. At this stage you explain why you are right and they are wrong. It could be something as simple as pointing out that your evidence is more recent or qualified. Other ways to resolve the issue include: use of historical example, a claim of a consensus viewpoint. The most common way to resolve an argument is to prove that your side contains internal logic that is not assumed by the other side’s argument.

(5) Impact the importance of winning the argument. The final step involves providing an impact assessment. You want to get maximum credit for winning the particular clash battle so tell the judge what it is exactly that you win if they do resolve the issue in your favor.

Here is a complete example with the steps indicated along the way (you wouldn’t use the numbers, they are just to flag the different stages for this example):

“(1) Our third argument in the 1AR is that ‘schools are getting worse.’ (2) Statistics from all parts of the country indicate test scores are declining, and schools are literally falling apart. (3) They say ‘schools are getting better.’ (4) Our evidence is more recent than their evidence and comes from studies whereas their evidence is just one person’s opinion. (5) If we win this it proves we win inherency, that status quo efforts are failing.”

This technique has a number of benefits. It encourages you to actually extend your original argument, not simply repeat it. If all you do is repeat your argument it does not help the judge resolve the debate at all. The team that resolves the argument – taking it to the next level – will have a big advantage with the judge.

Second, the 5-step technique helps the judge follow along with the development of the argument. In a way it creates a conversation back-and-forth in the judge’s mind. By making a word-for-word reference to the other team’s argument you help the judge recognize that you are indeed answering the other side.

COACHING THE MECHANICS OF HAVING A DEBATE: FLOWING

Debates will become complicated. Even in relatively simple rounds there are often 20 or 30 claims that must be addressed. Keeping these arguments organized is crucial for success and to make sure you don't miss anything. If you miss something you will likely lose.

As a way to keep track of both teams' arguments debate has developed a convention known as "flowing." Flowing is basically a system for organizing and following along the details of the debate. While most young debaters view flowing as a chore, more experienced debaters quickly understand that having a good flow makes winning debates much easier.

Flowing is keeping a record of the speech-by-speech course of each argument. There is a standardized way to do it, but each person tends to develop her or his own variations. Learning how to flow may be one of the most difficult and boring tasks in learning how to debate, but it is among the most important. Some people flow on paper, and some flow using a computer spreadsheet program. Here are some basic steps to get started.

Step 1: Divide each sheet (paper or computer) into seven columns. Each column represents one speech in the debate. There are eight speeches in the debate but the two Negative Block speeches can be put in one column. Seven is the most columns you will ever need. Start in the left-most column then keep moving one column to the right for each later speech. At first, you'll find it helpful to write the speech abbreviations (1AC, 1NC etc.) at the top of each column.

Step 2: Start with the Case Flow. Do this by writing the details of the 1AC Case in the left-most column, from top-to-bottom. Try to write down the numbers or letters, the tags, the main point of the argument, and any details you can of the evidence that is read. You can use several sheets for the Case Flow to keep the major points of the 1AC separated.

Step 3: The 1NC speech will be flowed partly on new sheets and partly on the Case Flow sheets. When the 1NC presents Off-Case arguments they should start on their own new sheets (the Off-Case Flows) in the left-most column. Each Off-Case argument should be on its own sheet. When the 1NC starts to attack the affirmative Case, the flowing should switch over to the Case Flow where you would write in the second column, next to the related parts of the 1AC.

Step 4: The 2AC (and subsequent speeches) responses should be written down on their appropriate sheet, depending on whether they are answering the Off-Case arguments or rebuilding their Case. Off-Case arguments stay on the Off-Case Flows, and all the Case arguments stay on the Case Flow. Keep the Off-Case Flows separate from each other.

Step 5: When it is your own turn to speak, prepare by writing out your arguments in the columns that belong to you. Try to keep your writing in those columns. You might want to make your columns wider so you'll have more space to write things out in detail.

Step 6: Develop shorthand abbreviations. You'll quickly learn that you don't have time to write out words all the way otherwise you'll miss too much. Come up with a shorthand that you (and your partner) can recognize. You can use "AF" to abbreviate "Africa". You can use the letter "T" to abbreviate "Topicality". You can use symbols, like an up-arrow to stand-in for "increase". Even words that aren't jargon can be shortened. In the place of the word "engagement" you could write "eng".

Step 7: Practice, practice, practice. This is really the only way to learn how to flow and to improve. Flow practice debates and any other debates you see, even if you are just an observer. Practice abbreviations when you are taking notes in school.

COACHING THE LIFE BLOOD OF DEBATE: EVIDENCE

The way to support your arguments is to have evidence. Evidence might come from your own experience, common knowledge, or based on a story that someone told you. Most evidence for debate rounds comes from research done in the library or on the internet. Generally you look for examples, statistics or testimony that supports the claims you want to make. Evidence comes from books, magazines, journals, newspapers, and web sites. A number of debates are won because one team has better evidence. So what makes evidence “better”?

The Qualities of “Good” Evidence

You want evidence that is full of solid reasoning and warrants, not just claims. Evidence that has reasoning is more persuasive and credible than evidence without it. If someone told you to do something and you asked why and all they said was “because I said so” they would not be providing a warrant and you wouldn’t find their request very persuasive.

Suppose you wanted to prove that Senator Obama will be elected President of the U.S. You might find a quote that says “Senator Obama will be elected because he opposed the Iraq War from the beginning” it implicitly has a warrant that politicians who opposed the war have a better chance of winning. That warrant makes it stronger than if it said simply “Obama will win.” Evidence can have more than one warrant, which would make it even stronger.

You want evidence that is recent. Some claims are true at certain times but proven false over the course of time. The more recent your evidence is the greater chance it might remain true, other factors equal. You wouldn’t want evidence from 1998 for a prediction of who was going to win the Super Bowl this year. You might not even want evidence from three months ago.

You want evidence that comes from qualified sources. Qualifications refer to the credentials or experience of the author of your evidence. Other things equal it is assumed that sources who are more experienced or credentialed are more likely to be right.

You want evidence that comes from unbiased sources. Some sources, while they may be very experienced and credentialed, might have questionable credibility because they are “biased”. Being “biased” means that the source has a motivation that could override their interest in telling the truth. A politician might be more concerned about the political effects on their campaign than they are about the truth. A business leader might have strong economic interest in saying something that isn’t the truth. A friend or relatively might be motivated by loyalty or love more than the desire to tell the truth.

When you find your evidence you are required to have a complete citation before you can use it in a debate round. What makes for a complete citation?

The Parts of a Complete Citation

When you find a piece of evidence it is essential that you provide a complete citation for it so that someone can look it up if they want to. Think of it like a bibliography. Getting the source citation correct is often boring and detailed, but it is very important to be done accurately.

A full and complete citation includes: the author, the qualification, the source, the complete date, and the URL or page number. Here is an example:

Michael O’Hanlon, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institute, Brookings Web Site, November 18, 2007 http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2007/1118_pakistan_ohanlon.aspx

COACHING HOW TO FIND EVIDENCE: RESEARCH STRATEGIES

You need to have a plan of attack when you begin to research. When you set out to find evidence it is helpful to have an idea of what arguments you are trying to support ahead of time. Those ideas can often come from brainstorming sessions by you and your teammates. As you think of ideas for arguments you should write them down and save them to review when you begin your research.

Doing outstanding research is a function of effort. The best-researched teams are the ones that spend the most time doing it. Just like in most things, the more work you put into it the greater your chances of success. Some times it takes a while to find any evidence for your point at all. Other times you can find average-quality evidence but it takes more time to find high-quality evidence.

Thoroughness is crucial, and can prove decisive in winning and losing. When you find good evidence you should bookmark the web site or write down the part of the library you used. You will find that as you gain more experience with researching that it will get easier and you will develop your own shortcuts and strategies for being efficient. As you become more experienced with debate rounds you will learn a sense of how good your evidence must be to help you win the debate.

Library

The library at your school or community might be a good source for finding materials on the debate topic. You can often discover good evidence in books, from reference documents, journals and magazines and sometimes paper copies of newspapers.

If you are unfamiliar with how to search for books, journals and newspapers in nearby libraries ask the librarians to help you get started. They will be eager to assist you. That is their job.

Internet

Most debate research these days is done over the internet. It can be done either at school or at home depending on where you have access.

A common internet-based research strategy is to use a search engine like Google or Yahoo. Using either a basic or advanced search in one of these programs can help you find relevant web sites, newspapers and reports. Google Scholar is a good resource for finding articles in academic journals, although sometimes you have to have a subscription to get access to those articles.

Evaluating the Internet

The internet is a fantastic resource for debate research. Most of you are already very experienced with how to use it to find things that you want. In many ways the internet helps to equalize access to research across urban, suburban and rural areas. On the other hand, there are many potential pitfalls with internet research – namely, anyone with a keyboard can “publish” internet materials. It is important to be able to sort out the good from the bad.

Unfortunately, most of this evaluation has to be done on a case-by-case basis. You can often judge a web site based on the factors of authority, accuracy, objectivity and how up-to-date it is. Does the site provide authoritative references and footnotes? Do its claims conform to what you already know, and what other authors claim? Does the web site treat alternative ideas fairly and thoroughly? Has it been updated recently?

COACHING COMMUNICATION STYLE - VERBAL

Every speaker has his or her own style, and that's a good thing. Whether you try to or not, you will have your own unique signature as a speaker. This offers a bit of choice, however. On the one hand, you want to have a distinctive style. On the other hand, you don't want to be so distinctive that it becomes a distraction to the judge. Style is part of substance. Your body language, volume, speed, variety all say something about your credibility. Some qualities have proven more effective in general than others.

Clarity

Effective communication depends importantly on your clarity. Your style choices are crucial in determining the clarity of your communication. Volume, speed, variance, language choices are all factors in your clarity. Start by understanding yourself what you want to say. Use concise statements – short and to the point – whenever you can. Limit the jargon and technical language when required by your audience.

Volume

If you are too loud your judge may resist your message and shut down their listening. If you are too soft it becomes too difficult for you judge to pay close attention. Your room may have bad acoustics based on the room size or shape. You want to sound energetic and enthusiastic, which requires some volume. You also want to raise your voice sometimes for emphasis. You can often look to your judge for feedback on volume.

Pitch

Your voice can be so high that your judge finds it grating. It may be so low that it becomes distorted. If you have just one tone (monotone) you become boring. You also want to avoid a repetitive inflection of rising or falling as your sentence goes on. Relaxing will help your pitch. Don't have a fake "debate voice" or inflection. Be yourself and be conversational in pitch. If your pitch is too high, project from your stomach, not your throat or nose.

Rate

When you first start debating you may be "too slow." This "problem" generally takes care of itself as you become more experienced. Most debaters go too fast for their own clarity. They go so fast they begin to garble their words. Speed without clarity is harmful to your ability to persuade the judge. Debaters often fail to recognize that while they can understand 100% of their own spoken words, the judge understands a much smaller percentage. Most debaters would actually effectively communicate more ideas per minute if they slowed down a little bit.

Articulation

The concept of articulation refers to the distinctiveness or clarity of the words that you say. Some times articulation problems are caused by a debater trying to go too fast. Other times it is due to a mush-mouth. The easy solution to this problem, besides slowing down a bit, is opening your mouth wider and putting effort into finishing your words.

Pronunciation

It is important to have correct pronunciation – saying your words correctly. It can greatly undermine your credibility if you don't pronounce your words right, or you confuse two words that sound alike. Don't over-reach on your vocabulary. Listen to how other speakers say certain words. You can also look up in a dictionary to see how words are pronounced.

COACHING COMMUNICATION STYLE – NON-VERBAL

Think of the first day of school. You're sitting in the classroom waiting for your teacher to show up. When that teacher walks in the room you look at her. Before she says anything you make judgments. How well is she dressed? Does she seem confident, energetic? Does she seem friendly and smile? Does she look right at the class before she starts?

These are just a few examples of how speakers communicate without saying a word. Non-verbal traits are crucial for conveying honesty, respect, and competence. As important as first impressions are, many times they are non-verbal. The way judges evaluate debaters follows this pattern.

Appearance

It is important to have your own sense of style, and that includes the way you dress. On the other hand, you do not want your appearance to be distracting to the judge. If you are underdressed the judge will think you aren't professional and don't take the activity seriously. If you have poor hygiene (messy hair, unshaven) it will convey the same lack of respect. What do you think of your teacher on that first day of school if they walk in without combing their hair?

Gestures

Speakers are told – you must have gestures. As a result, many gestures are forced and look stiff, they are poorly timed, they seem random and unconnected to the message, and gestures can become repetitive and even distracting. Despite these concerns, debaters should not fear gestures. As long as the gestures are natural, modest, and connected to their message, they can be an effective way to underline what they are saying.

Body Language

The way you stand, walk and move during your speech conveys information to the judge. If you seem hesitant getting prepared to speak, it sets a bad tone. If you seem eager to finish your speech and sit down, it makes the judge think you are dissatisfied with what you said. If you slouch, pace nervously, or sway, it sends a bad signal to the judge or is distracting. Debaters should stand up straight. Walk up to the podium and back from the podium in an upright, confident way.

Eye Contact

In our culture, eye contact is one of the most important aspects of communication. How do you react to a sales person who looks down at their shoes when they are talking to you? What do you think of your teacher if they look above the class the entire time? In our culture, evasive eye contact is interpreted as lying or insincerity. Debaters should establish eye contact at the start and conclusions of their speech, as well as many times in-between. This enables you to make a connection with the judge. Eye contact is also a crucial way for a debater to receive feedback.

Facial Expressions

Some debaters think they need to be a stone-face to convey seriousness. Others take facial expressions to such an extreme they are phony. As with most other "rules" of communication, just being your normal self is the best strategy with facial expressions. Debaters should convey a sense of friendliness and goodwill by smiling before they start to speak. Don't force your facial expressions.

12 MINUTES UP FOR GRABS: COACHING CROSS EXAMINATION

Cross-examination, also referred to as "CX" or "cross-ex," is a question and answer period that follows every constructive speech where the speaker answers questions about their speech.

The key to effective cross-examination, just like any other part of debate, is hard work and preparation. Those debaters who put considerable thought into their cross-ex strategies will be much more successful much better than those debaters who don't plan ahead for the questions they want to ask. Those who prepare for cross-exam periods will win them, and consequently, more debates. The 12 minutes of CX in the debate are literally up for grabs.

Cross-examination Style

First, stand-up and face the judge. This is an important part of being credible. Second, be forceful and clear. You want the judge to be able to hear every question and answer. Third, maintain eye contact with your judge. They are your target audience. Finally, do not be rude or evasive in cross-examinations. Question and answer sessions reveal more about you as a person (and as an advocate). Judges will be evaluating your personality as much as the content of your questions or answers

Using Cross-Ex for Clarification

Both the affirmative and the negative can **use cross-examination for clarification**. These questions usually are the first ones you would ask in cross-examination. Ask clarification questions first if your partner is relying on that information to help them prepare their upcoming speech. If you need to ask for evidence do so at the start if your partner needs it. Ask for the evidence at the end if it is for you to read. Clarifying questions are important because they allow you to be sure what your opponent is arguing.

Strategy for Cross-Ex

Cross-examination can be used effectively as a **strategic tool to set-up arguments** that you will make later in the debate. Using cross-examination in this manner requires some preparation and pre-round planning. Preparation for cross-ex periods really pays off. Cross-ex can be a very valuable tool for making good arguments even better.

Do not expect your opponents to concede anything important in the cross-ex period.

Matlock is a fictional TV show. Very few debate teams break down and admit that their plan is not topical in the cross-ex. Do not expect concessions. Use the C-X to lead the other team to the edge of the cliff, push them over during your subsequent speech.

Do not dwell on the same point for the entire cross-examination period. Very rarely does it help to spend more than one of the three minutes pursuing a particular line of questioning. Ask your question once or twice and if you are not getting satisfaction from the answers you hear, go ahead and move on. Count on the judge being frustrated with you.

Answer questions fully, but do not be obnoxious about consuming lots of time. Make the C-X period an extension of your earlier speech, with additional explanation, if possible. If you try to be evasive or run on and on your judge will recognize it and reach a negative conclusion.

Finally, **answer and ask questions only for yourself, not your partner**. Don't interrupt your partner's answer just because you think you have a slightly better answer. At most, just write down what you want your partner to say and show it to them. When one partner hogs the cross-ex it undermines the credibility of the other half of the team.

COACHING INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE SPEECHES

Like in most other competitive activities you can get better at debate by practicing between tournaments. Beyond researching, writing blocks and organizing your evidence you can improve your chances for success by practicing your speaking. There are some drills that are designed to improve your speaking skills, others that focus more on the content of the topic.

Speaking drills are for everyone. Debaters from novices to top varsity can benefit from practicing. As some have said, speaking drills are like preparing for a marathon – you don't practice once or twice and then run a marathon. You have to train every day, even after you win a marathon, because there is always another race to run. Get in the habit of doing speaking drills every day. Even 10 minutes a day can make a huge difference.

Speaking Skill Drills

In general, delivery problems are usually caused by a lack of familiarity with your materials. Begin the habit of reading your briefs as you file them. Repeat the practice for important blocks. You also could practice by reading materials that are unrelated to your debate topic. This will help you focus on the mechanics of speaking, not the substance. Start your speeches a little slowly and build up your speed.

Warm up before rounds if you have the time. Read out loud on the way to the tournament in the morning. Find a place at the school before your rounds to read through some blocks.

To correct breathing problems (huge gasps of air) you should practice by breathing at natural pauses in evidence, such as at punctuation. You can also practice by breathing at natural break points in the speech such as after the tag, after a piece of evidence, or between arguments. Practice breathing from your stomach not your throat or nose. Stand up as straight as possible.

To correct enunciation problems you should practice by reading your evidence slowly and exaggerate hitting all the syllables. Slowly build up your speed. Have someone listen to you and see if they can understand every word you say. Open your mouth wider, to an exaggerated degree.

To correct choppy speech try reading ahead a few words further. Push yourself to have your eyes read further and further ahead of what your mouth is saying. Ignore any stutters or stumbles, don't bother going back to repeat a word you might have messed up. Use a natural voice pattern. Try slowing your speaking a little bit.

Record and review your speeches, both audio and video if you can. Download the video to your MP3 player or computer to watch it over and over to learn your areas for improvement.

Rebuttal Reworks

For advanced debaters, you can practice the substance of debate rounds by **reworking your speeches from previous tournament** or practice rounds. Take the flow of your old speech and completely rewrite your entire speech. Add arguments and evidence. Typically you will find that you can give the same speech in much less time. If that is the case, write out more arguments (don't repeat anything) and give the speech again. You can do this over and over until you've added a huge amount of new arguments. This practice technique enables you to see your greatest potential. Every once in a while you'll have a debate at a tournament that is a repeat of a previous round. If you have practiced your rebuttal from that debate you'll be awesome the second time around. Do as many rebuttal reworks as you can.

COACHING THE AFFIRMATIVE CASE

When you are the affirmative team, you have the responsibility to present a Case and Plan in your first speech. The Affirmative Case must establish that there is a significant problem in the current system (Harm), that the current system cannot or will not correct the problem (Inherency), and that you have a plan that will solve or improve the condition (Solvency).

Harm

When you are affirmative you have the responsibility of showing there is a significant problem in the status quo. This is called the burden of **Harm**. To meet this burden the affirmative documents the extent and the importance of their Harm area.

For instance, your Affirmative Case might claim the Harm area of failing schools. There would be several possible ways to demonstrate the extent of the problem through the use of evidence – the percentage of schools that are in need of repair, the percentage of students who are not learning, the number of dropouts, declining test scores and more.

The second aspect of the Harm claim is showing the importance of these statistics. In the example of failing schools the affirmative could argue that academic achievement is crucial for employment opportunity, going to college, or achieving social progress.

Some Harm claims emphasize the quantity of its extent – such as millions of people starving to death, or thousands of people dying in a war. Other Harm claims might emphasize the quality or value – the intrinsic value of biodiversity, the unfairness of discrimination, the immorality of violating fundamental rights, are examples. The best affirmative Harm claims have strong quantitative and value components.

Inherency

As part of building the Case, the affirmative must prove that the current system – often referred to as the “status quo” – is incapable and unlikely to solve the Harm area. Part of this is documenting that the Harm will continue without the proposed solution of the Affirmative Plan.

This burden is referred to as “Inherency.” If the affirmative fails to prove their Harm area is Inherent, there is no reason to vote for the Affirmative Plan since it is not necessary. If the current system is working to solve the problem, there is no case for changing the system.

Inherency claims include descriptions of the attitudes or structures that demonstrate the present system is insufficient. If a problem is getting worse that is evidence the current system is not addressing the Harm area.

In our example of failing schools the affirmative might offer evidence of a lack of adequate funding for school construction and repairs. They might argue that because teacher salaries are so low there are not enough qualified people interested in that job.

COACHING SOLVENCY AND THE AFFIRMATIVE PLAN

Solvency

It is not enough for the affirmative team to show there is a problem that is not being addressed in the status quo. They must also prove that they have a solution that can work. The proposed solution, called the Affirmative Plan, must be proven to be comparatively better than the current system.

That is the third component of the Affirmative Case – called “Solvency” – proof that their proposal can solve or reduce the Harm area they have identified in their Case. In policy debates the affirmative must present a proposed action by leaders – i.e. Congress passing a law, the Supreme Court making a decision, the President taking action.

The Affirmative Case must include a Solvency point that contains evidence that demonstrates the Affirmative Plan will solve or improve the Harm area.

For example, if a certain State (say, Ohio) has successfully used higher teacher salaries to improve schools, the affirmative team might propose to have the Federal Government copy that state. The affirmative would present evidence about how higher teacher salaries in the State of Ohio have increased academic achievement there.

The Affirmative Plan

The affirmative should present in their first speech a specific proposal for a course of action to be taken. They advocate that the judge endorse or vote for this proposal. This proposal is referred to as the “Affirmative Plan.”

The Affirmative Plan must be an example of – or come from – the resolution. That is referred to as the burden of “Topicality” (page 15).

There are two basic considerations for the Affirmative Plan: the agent of action and the actions themselves.

The agent of action is where the affirmative team specifies who will be implementing their plan. The resolution may indicate the “Federal Government” should be the agent. Some resolutions specify the “United States” or the “United States Federal Government.” The affirmative may want to go into more detail and specify the part of the Federal Government they imagine should implement the affirmative Plan, such as the Congress, President, the Supreme Court or possibly a government department like the Department of Defense.

In our example of school reform the logical agents would be the Congress and President.

The second consideration for the affirmative plan is the actions that they propose are taken. These actions are typically tied pretty closely to the evidence presented in the affirmative’s Solvency point. In our example of school reform the Affirmative Plan would state that the Federal Government should copy the system of higher teacher pay used by the State of Ohio throughout the entire United States.

COACHING: SAMPLE OUTLINE - AFFIRMATIVE CASE AND PLAN

This outline is an example of a structure for an Affirmative Case and Plan that they would present in their First Affirmative Constructive. It consists of three main “contentions” and the affirmative Plan. Each contention represents one of the three burdens the affirmative must demonstrate for a complete Case: Harm, Inherency and Solvency. Under each major contention there might be sub-points, although there is no set number for that. For each contention and sub-point there would be evidence supporting those claims.

- I. Harm – Schools in the United States are Bad Shape**
 - A. Schools All Through the U.S. are Falling Apart**
 - B. Test Scores are Declining for Millions of Students**
 - C. Academic Achievement is Crucial**
 - 1. Success in College**
 - 2. Employment Opportunities**
 - 3. There is a “Right” to Adequate Education**
- II. Inherency – The Status Quo Fails to Improve Schools**
 - A. Insufficient Resources Being Spent on Schools**
 - 1. Federal Government**
 - 2. State Governments**
 - B. Teacher Salaries Are Way Too Low**

Affirmative Plan: The United States Federal Government should adopt a policy of raising teacher salaries, modeled after the program in the State of Ohio.

- III. Solvency – Our Plan Will Improve Schools**
 - A. Higher Teacher Salaries will Attract More Qualified People**
 - B. Teachers are the Key to Better Schools**
 - C. This Proposal is working in the State of Ohio**

COACHING THE SPEECH: FIRST AFFIRMATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE

In any debate it is a strong advantage to go first. Many judges or audiences have short attention spans and will only pay attention at the beginning. After that their interest may fade. Further, the judge and audience tends to make quick judgments about the debaters based on their early impressions.

The First Affirmative Constructive (1AC) is always the first speech in the debate. It is the initial opportunity for the affirmative team to present and defend their Case and Plan. It is a way for the affirmative team to stake their own ground, and choose any area of the topic they want to talk about. The 1AC should be designed strategically to emphasize the affirmative's strongest arguments.

Substance

The 1AC is generally **completely written out ahead of time**. The entire outline of the Case and Plan (see sample on page 11) should be presented at this time. Typically the affirmative should place their best evidence in their 1AC. "Best" in this case might mean the longest, most qualified, and most recent evidence with the strongest warrants.

Your 1AC **evidence should have qualifications**, and those should be read in the speech itself. Not only does this help establish the credibility for your Case and Plan, but it also sets up possible comparisons with evidence the negative might read. Typically the affirmative has better research on their own Case than the negative does, so they usually have better qualified evidence.

After you have selected the evidence that forms your basic case sub-points think defensively and include cards that **anticipate common negative arguments**. Where you think there might be a weak spot, find some back-up evidence.

Adjustments to your 1AC are crucial as the year goes on. After you have been to a tournament or two, **evaluate your evidence selection** in your 1AC. Are there cards in your current 1AC that you seldom use in the rounds? If so, consider taking them out of your speech. Are there cards that you find you are always reading in the 2AC? If so, consider adding those cards.

Style

Not only is it important to make a good initial impression on the judge, the 1AC literally lays the foundation for the entire rest of the debate for the affirmative team. Both affirmative debaters in later speeches will want to frequently refer back to their 1AC, so it is crucial for the judge to understand and absorb it right away. In particular, read the Plan a little more slowly and clearly so the judge understands what you are proposing right away.

Because the 1AC is completely scripted before the debate, it is easy to practice so that it sounds very professional and polished. The First Affirmative debater should present all the headings, tag lines, and evidence very clearly and persuasively. The evidence should be read with strong internal emphasis.

COACHING THE SPEECH: SECOND AFFIRMATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE

The two main jobs for the Second Affirmative Speech (2AC) are first, to rebuild the affirmative Case, and second, to respond to the Off-Case arguments presented by the 1NC. The 2AC is the affirmative's last constructive speech so it is their final chance to make the arguments they need to win the debate.

Preparing at Home

The 2AC is a speech where time allocation is especially important so preparation is a crucial asset. Most of the arguments the negative will make against your Case and Plan can be anticipated, and therefore can be prepared for at home before the tournament.

The affirmative should **write sets of answers** to every topicality argument, every disadvantage, every counterplan and every Critique they think of. This is referred to as "writing front-lines." After each tournament you should review your flows and update your answer files where necessary. This kind of detailed preparation can make a crucial difference in winning and losing on the affirmative.

Responding to Off-Case Arguments

The 2AC must **respond to each Off-Case argument presented in the 1NC**. Generally you want to "group" each Off-Case argument and respond to it with one block of numbered arguments. Front-lines they should be quickly pulled and made ready to read.

The 2AC should **allocate time according to how much time the negative spends** Off-case for each argument. For example, if the negative spends 4 minutes Off-case and 4 minutes on the Case in the 1NC, the 2AC should roughly do the same allocation. Most likely the 2AC can afford to spend a bit more time on the Off-case arguments since they can rely on the 1AC evidence to help answer the Case arguments.

The 2AC should **diversify the types of answers** that are made against each Off-case argument. Do not focus on just one or two specific types of arguments, but instead present a wide variety. This diversity should include "turn" strategies on disadvantages, counterplans and critiques. Designing strong response strategies is equally important as your affirmative Case construction.

Re-Building Your Case

The 1NC will usually make many arguments against your affirmative Case, including attacks on Harm, Inherency and Solvency. It is the job of the 2AC to **rebuild the Case back to its original strength**. You will have to answer those arguments on an efficient, line-by-line basis. It is very important that the 2A debater be an expert on their Case, inside and out.

Use the 1AC evidence generously. The 1AC evidence is the strongest in the affirmative file. The 2AC should refer back to the evidence, both the substance of the reasoning in the evidence, as well as the quality of the sources. If the affirmative has written a strong case the 2AC should have to read very little new evidence on the Case side of the debate.

Prepare power-worded summaries of your case Harms. The larger the affirmative Harm claim the more persuasive the Case is, and that leads to a greater chance of winning. You can prepare sweet, carefully worded descriptions of your Harms that you can use in your 2AC (and rebuttal speeches, too).

COACHING THE SPEECH: FIRST AFFIRMATIVE REBUTTAL

The First Affirmative Rebuttal (1AR) must cover all of the arguments extended by the negative team in both the 2NC and the 1NR, including the off-case and on-case arguments.

The sheer timing of this is difficult considering the 1AR is only 5 minutes long and the negative block is 13 minutes. Obviously the 1AR must be selective and very efficient.

Strategy

The 1AR should **have a strategy in mind for allocating time**. Generally the 1AR should allocate their time in proportion to the way the negative block did. For example, if one-third of the negative block was spent on extending a Topicality argument, approximately one-third of the 1AR should be spent answering it. This guideline must be adjusted based on the quality of the negative's arguments, the strengths of your earlier affirmative arguments, and the importance of each argument toward winning and losing the debate.

The 1AR should **use their partner's 2AC as a reference point** for their speech. The 1AC evidence and analysis can also be used as well. As the 1AR extends the case and off-case arguments they should make direct reference ("signpost" – see page 5) to the 2AC speech. Refer back to their tags, analysis, author of evidence and the reasoning in their evidence. This does not mean the 1AR must extend every single 2AC argument, only the most important ones.

The 1AR also needs to **think of the speech as a set-up speech for the 2AR**. The 1AR must extend a diverse array of arguments so as to provide flexibility for the 2AR. For example, when answering a disadvantage the 1AR should extend link, uniqueness and impact arguments if possible. That way the 2AR can choose among them.

Tactics

The 1AR **concentrate on word economy**. It is vitally important that the 1AR not repeat arguments in different places on the flow. The goal of the 1AR, as with the other rebuttals, is to make 5 minutes of completely different arguments. Repeating an answer usually is a waste of your time. Word economy must start at the beginning of the speech, not just at the end.

The 1AR must **respond directly to the negative's arguments**. It is not enough to simply repeat your 2AC answers or your 1AC arguments. You must ask yourself, "What arguments did the negative make that would make the most impression on the judge?" then directly answer those arguments. Reminder: your job is to extend, not just repeat, the affirmative arguments.

The 1AR should **avoid "dropping" really important arguments**. As has already been mentioned, the 1AR is a very time-pressured speech. It may be difficult to cover every negative argument that you want to. In that case, the 1AR should be sure not to put crucial arguments at the end of their speech where they may not get to them at all. Arguments like Topicality that are "all-or-nothing" should not be saved for last.

If possible, the 1AR should try to **read some supporting evidence**. This evidence should be chosen selectively to respond to the most dangerous aspects of the negative strategy.

COACHING THE SPEECH: SECOND AFFIRMATIVE REBUTTAL

The Second Affirmative Rebuttal (2AR) is the final speech in the debate, which gives the affirmative a huge advantage. Some judges and audiences will remember best what they hear most recently. The 2AR needs to make a strong speech to take full advantage of this lasting impression.

Strategy

As the “closing statement” for the affirmative team 2AR must summarize and put-together the entire strategy, both Case and Off-Case. The 2AR must completely explain the affirmative Case and how they have a comparative advantage over the negative policy. Again, the 2AR should have practiced, well-worded descriptions of the affirmative Harm claims to make them seem as big and compelling as possible.

The 2AR must **assess which arguments are necessary to win** the debate, and also determine what arguments the affirmative can afford to lose. Then they should start off by setting out to win their most impressive argument decisively and early in the speech. Generally that will be a specific advantage or Harm area. It might be a comprehensive link or theory argument.

In addition to summarizing the affirmative arguments, the 2AR must also address all the arguments extended by the last negative speaker. **Adapt to their weaknesses.** If the 2NR mishandles an argument, capitalize. Be realistic that you may not win every argument in the debate, but explain to the judge how you still win overall.

Put the debate in an overall framework where the arguments you win seem more important than the arguments you think the negative may win. Use an overview at the beginning.

Tactics

Refer back to the 1AR frequently. You cannot make up new arguments in the 2AR. Sometimes the judge will have a hard time telling whether or not your argument is new or not. The more you refer back directly to your partner’s arguments the more it sounds like your 2AR arguments are grounded there, not brand new. This is especially true in relation to evidence that was read.

Directly clash with your opponent’s best arguments. The 2NR will likely make some pretty persuasive sounding arguments. Figure out which ones are creating the best impression on the judge and clash with them word-for-word.

The agenda of the 2AR should be affirmative arguments, not negative extensions. The 2AR should be based on previous affirmative answers. Signpost back to those arguments and explain them before you address the negative points. This will make sure that you are spending your time on your ground, not on theirs.

The 2AR should **be selective and somewhat slower** than previous speeches. As the last speech, the 2AR has the freedom not to worry about what comes afterwards. Choose a few arguments and develop them thoroughly. A rushed, frantic 2AR sounds like a losing 2AR. Lowering the speed generates a sense of confidence and boosts credibility.

COACHING: DESIGNING THE NEGATIVE STRATEGY

Designing the negative strategy is one of the most important aspects of preparation. It is important to focus your energies on coherent and logical positions. There are two kinds of negative strategies: specific and generic. Specific strategies are for Cases that you know about. Generic strategies are for times when you have no specific strategy. This may happen when the affirmative runs a brand new Case.

When you brainstorm, ask some questions about the affirmative. What are the basic assumptions of the affirmative Case? The answers will form the basis of your on-case attack. Who would be hurt by adoption of the plan? The answer to this question will help form the bases of your disadvantages. Are there any basic questions of philosophy their plan violates? This will help you decide on critiques. Finally, is there some better way to solve the problem? This helps with designing counterplans.

The negative strategy should avoid repetitive parts. For the Case arguments the negative should choose a set of responses that are not redundant. Also avoid choosing disadvantages or critiques that have similar links or impacts.

The negative strategy should avoid inconsistent or contradictory parts. The negative almost never benefits from contradictory arguments as you can only win the debate on one or the other. Plus contradictions set up the possibility of the affirmative being able to get out of both.

Design the negative strategy so you can kick out of parts of it later in the debate. It is very difficult for the 2NR to cover all aspects of the 1AR. Both speeches are the same length, but the 1AR does not have to wrap up the debate as the 2NR does. Ideally the negative team would extend certain arguments in the negative block that they will not need to cover in the 2NR. Even a small concession might make a huge difference.

For example a negative team could extend a topicality argument in the 2NC which the 1AR might spend 1 minute answering. The negative could then concede this topicality argument, gaining an extra minute for the 2NR for covering all remaining arguments of the 1AR. Gaining an extra minute in a 5-minute speech is a huge strategic advantage.

Finally, **design strategies that would appeal to a wide variety of judges.** Some judges are conservative on debate theory and some are liberal. Some judges have broad views of the topic some have narrow views. It is risky to devise a strategy at home that only would appeal to a narrow range of judges.

Generic Strategies

Generic negative strategies are necessary sometimes. It is impossible for the negative to always have specific attacks against every affirmative case and plan.

Generic attacks should follow the above guidelines as much as possible. Avoid repetitiveness, contradictions and build in some flexibility. In addition, always try to tie the specific affirmative plan to the generic evidence as best possible. Even if the negative has no specific evidence matching up to the affirmative case or plan they can often successfully argue that the affirmative plan is the same as other plans with the common link.

COACHING TOPICALITY

Debates are governed by a resolution, referred to as the topic. Policy resolutions, like the one you have, are written broadly to allow for many examples. The affirmative must be able to prove that their Plan is actually an example of the resolution. This is referred to as having a “topical” Plan – it falls under the topic, so it is topical. But words, including the words in the topic, are subject to some interpretation, so this issue is not always clear-cut.

The burden on the affirmative to have a topical Plan has a debate jargon name that you will not find in most dictionaries: Topicality.

Topicality arguments play an important role in debates because they are an all-or-nothing issue. It is generally accepted that if the affirmative fails to prove that their Plan is Topical, they will lose. Many debates are decided for the negative on the issue of Topicality alone.

When the negative wants to advance a Topicality argument they must provide their own interpretation of the resolution, with definitions of words in the topic. They would then argue that their interpretation is the best one, for several possible reasons, based on standards for interpretations (discussed below). Then they would argue that the affirmative Plan “violates” their interpretation by falling outside of it. They also attack the affirmative’s interpretation of the topic. If the negative wins that the affirmative plan is not topical, they generally win the debate.

Notice that the focus of Topicality is the affirmative Plan not the Case. The advantages claimed by the affirmative are not subject to topicality scrutiny no matter how distant from the topic they seem. If the affirmative Plan is judged to be topical, they have met their entire topicality burden.

To defend against this, the affirmative generally provides their own interpretation of the resolution – one that clearly includes their Plan. The affirmative also usually attacks the specific negative interpretation as being too restrictive or unusual. Usually the judge decides between the two interpretations.

Topicality Standards

Here are some ways to evaluate interpretations of the resolution – called “standards.” Both teams use standards either separately or in combination depending on what their interpretation is like in the specific debate.

Standards: Is the interpretation too limited or too unlimited? Is the interpretation consistent with common dictionary definitions? Is the interpretation consistent with the way experts in the policy area use the terms? Is the interpretation grammatically correct? Is the interpretation predictable for both teams, or is it very unusual? Finally, does the interpretation lead us toward or away from the core issues we would expect to debate under the resolution?

The wisdom of all of these is subject to argument. Even these standards are debatable within a debate. Are limited resolutions good for education because they focus debate on a few key issues, or are they bad for education because they stifle creative thinking? There is no debate rulebook to resolve this. It’s up to the arguments each team can present in the round.

Quite often there will be “competing standards” in a round. For instance the affirmative might have a dictionary definition to back up their interpretation, but the negative might be able to prove that’s not the way experts in the field use those words. Who wins in that case? Again, it comes down to the arguments advanced about education and fairness in the round itself.

COACHING CASE DEBATE

Attacking Affirmative Harm Claims

One way to attack a harm claim is simply to provide evidence that it is declining and that the situation is getting better. Negative teams can also attack harm claims by proving that underlying circumstances have changed so that affirmative harm claims that may have been true in the past are no longer viable. The negative can boost their refutation of harm claims by citing scientific studies that empirically demonstrate how rare the affirmative harm is. The more qualified the negative source is the stronger the evidence is. One strategy for harm refutation is to attack the motivation of the affirmative authors. Perhaps they have a strong self-interest in making the problem seem greater than it is.

A powerful negative strategy is to argue that status quo programs are reducing the affirmative harm area. This simultaneously attacks both the harm and inherency (see next section) claim.

When the affirmative defends harms that are philosophical in nature the negative can argue that the affirmative criteria, or decision rule, is detrimental in the extreme. Another approach to philosophical harm areas is to defend the notion of pragmatism or realism as an overarching framework for our foreign policy. Finally, the negative could offer a counter-value, or an offsetting philosophical argument.

Attacking Inherency Claims

The affirmative must prove that the status quo will not solve their Harm claim. To attack their inherency claim the negative must prove that an actor in the status quo is taking a step that will address the significance of the affirmative's Harm claim. If the negative proves that the problem is being solved in the status quo they greatly reduce the comparative advantage offered by the affirmative plan. Another approach is to identify empirical examples of how status quo programs are already working. The negative can also attack the affirmative inherency claim by arguing there is a trend toward solving the affirmative problem. One other excellent strategy is to argue that agents other than those used in the affirmative plan are solving the problem.

Attacking Solvency Claims

The negative attack on the affirmative Solvency is often one of the most powerful strategies. Many affirmative plans make intuitive sense, but in the real world cannot fulfill their promise. There are generally many intervening factors between the specific mechanism in the plan and the ultimate effect the plan has on the situation in the real world. The primary way that the negative can contest solvency is to provide empirical examples of policy failures that are similar to the affirmative proposal.

Another common solvency approach is for the negative to provide alternative causes for the problem to continue. Some solvency arguments present alternative causes of the harm claim that the affirmative plan does not address. The debate terminology for this type of argument is "alternative causality." For instance if your car did not run because it was out of gasoline, and because it was missing spark plugs, a plan to purchase gasoline would not get your car running unless it also addressed the spark plugs. In this example the lack of spark plugs would be an alternative causality argument against a plan to buy gasoline. To develop alternative causality negative teams should collect proof of all the many causes of certain harm claims.

Solvency is typically a weak link in the affirmative comparative advantage analysis and should be challenged vigorously by the negative. Most affirmative plans are very idealistic and often ignore the realities of how difficult it can be to solve certain problems.

COACHING DISADVANTAGES

When people make proposals to do something, often there are drawbacks to that proposal. To consider a course of action we generally weigh the benefits against the potential downsides. Policy debate is no different. In fact, arguments about the downsides of affirmative Plans are one of the most common parts of a debate.

These drawbacks are called “disadvantages” (DA) in debate jargon. DA’s are arguments advanced by the negative team that represent the unique reasons why adopting the Plan would be a bad idea. If the negative team can prove the disadvantage to acting was greater than the advantage of acting the judge should not endorse the affirmative Plan and should vote negative.

Burdens of a Disadvantage

Disadvantages have parts to them. Just as an affirmative Case has to have Harm, Inherency and Solvency, and the affirmative Plan must be Topical, disadvantages have burdens they must meet before they become reasons to reject the affirmative. DA’s must have a link, be unique to the affirmative plan, and have an impact that outweighs the affirmative advantage.

Disadvantages must link to the affirmative plan. This means that the negative team must be able to prove that the drawback results from adoption of the specific affirmative Plan. Links can come from the actions of the Plan or the advantages of the Case. Some DA’s are based on several “internal links” – like a chain reaction. The affirmative can deny the link to a DA either by proving their Plan will not result in that outcome, or by questioning one of the internal links.

Disadvantages must also be “unique” to the affirmative plan. This burden means that the drawback occurs ONLY when the Plan is passed, that it won’t occur in the present system. For example suppose someone suggests that you go to dinner at Wendy’s and someone responded by saying, “don’t go there, the fries are greasy” (a DA). That person would have to prove that if you didn’t go to Wendy’s you would be able to find some food that wasn’t as greasy. If a DA is not uniquely caused by the affirmative plan it is not a reason to reject it. In our example, suppose the alternative to Wendy’s was McDonalds, you could say that McDonald’s had greasy food too so going to Wendy’s would not have a unique disadvantage of greasy food.

Disadvantages must have a large impact – one that is bigger than the advantage that the affirmative wins in the debate. The negative has to prove that the bad consequence of adopting the Plan would outweigh the benefits otherwise it isn’t a reason to reject the Plan. An example might be that the affirmative plan could hurt the economy, which would push us into a recession. The impact of the recession might be greater than the affirmative Case, especially if the negative is also making some inroads in beating the Case. Disadvantages with bigger bottom line impacts are better for the negative to run. Affirmatives could debate against the impact by saying it wouldn’t be so bad.

Turns

Often, one of the most powerful arguments an affirmative can make against a disadvantage is to say that their Plan actually has a positive effect in the area of the DA. That means the argument really becomes a net advantage, not a drawback, to adopting the plan. For example, suppose the person proposing we go to Wendy’s said that Wendy’s offered more grease-free options, like salads and baked potatoes, than any other fast food chain. In our example about the recession, the affirmative might have an argument that their Plan was actually good for the economy. Both of these would be example of “Turns” to the disadvantage. As you can see, turns are very important arguments and both teams should focus on them.

COACHING COUNTERPLANS

Many times in life we are not confronted with a simple choice between a proposal and the current path. Instead we are faced with one proposal weighed against a second proposal. For example, if your refrigerator breaks down, you may look at the option of buying a new refrigerator compared to the “status quo” of the broken appliance. But more likely you’ll compare one new refrigerator vs. another new one. In debate, when the negative defends an alternative policy and not the status quo, it is said that they are defending a “counterplan” (CP).

How to Run a Counterplan

Counterplans are policies that are defended by the negative team. It should be presented in the 1NC. It should be written out and be as detailed as an affirmative Plan.

The CP must be a reason to reject the Plan. To explain this, let’s go back to our example. Suppose your idea is to buy a GE refrigerator (the Plan). If someone else in your family said instead “let’s turn the lights on in the living room,” you would likely reject that suggestion as being irrelevant. Obviously, it would be possible to buy the GE fridge and also turn the lights on in the living room. There is no need to choose, so you’d still accept the initial idea.

To test whether or not the CP is a reason to reject the affirmative Plan you ask two questions. First, is it impossible to do both the Plan and the CP at the same time? If the answer is yes, then we are forced to choose. The second question: Is it the case that we *should not* do both the Plan and the CP at the same time? If the answer is yes, then it is illogical to do both together. In either of these cases the negative also has to prove that the CP is better than the Plan. This test is used to establish whether the CP meets its test of “competition.”

The most common strategy for the negative running a counterplan is to say there is some other way to solve the Harm area without triggering a DA that links to the Plan. For example, if the affirmative Plan was U.S. HIV/AIDS assistance to Africa, the negative could CP with European Union HIV/AIDS assistance to Africa. They would combine the CP with a DA to U.S. action, say a tradeoff in the USAID budget. So the negative would be saying the CP is a reason to reject the affirmative Plan because it solves the HIV/AIDS harm without triggering the USAID DA.

Answering a Counterplan

At first, debaters have a hard time answering counterplans until they get used to it. Most teams are used to comparing the Plan to the status quo, not to a CP. Experienced teams eventually learn how to design their affirmatives with the common counterplans in mind.

Here are some ideas: Find reasons that the CP does not solve the affirmative Harm area as well as the Plan (called a “solvency deficit”). Ask to read the CP and look for wording mistakes in the text. Present new affirmative advantages, ones that the CP does not solve very well. Challenge the CP if it does not have any specific solvency evidence. Come up with arguments for why it would be better to “do both” the Plan plus the CP.

Argue that the best policy would be to combine the Plan with part of the CP – this is referred to as a “permutation.” For example, you may suggest going out on a date to a movie. Your object of interest suggests instead going to dinner. You initially say, well why not “do both” and go to dinner and a movie? The response by your date is that there isn’t enough time to do both. So then you come up with the “permutation” of going to the movie then going out to get dessert (the best part of dinner, after all!). If the “perm” ends up being the wisest course of action, there is no reason to reject the initial idea of going to a movie, which is part of the permutation.

COACHING CRITIQUES

Some arguments that we use in everyday life do not fall into the categories of disadvantages or counterplans, but are still reasons to reject a course of action. These arguments often involve philosophical reasons to reject certain actions or the way we talk about those actions.

Imagine a situation where you and your friends are looking for a place to eat and one of your friends suggests Denny's. Someone else points out that Denny's has been involved in certain acts that might be considered racist – and therefore that you should look for somewhere else to eat. That objection to eating at Denny's isn't really a disadvantage – after all, it's not like you and your friends eating at Denny's is going to keep them in business, and shunning them won't cost them much. It's a statement of morality or principle on your part

Explanation of Critiques

A critique (sometimes written in the German 'kritik and abbreviated as a K) is a philosophical argument linked to a policy or language. Usually negative teams use critiques to attack the affirmative's fundamental assumptions or language. Often the affirmative makes these assumptions by choice and sometimes they do it because it's their job to defend the resolution. Critiques are usually complicated arguments, and many people are not familiar with the kinds of ideas associated with critiques.

A "representation" critique is the most common type. It is based on the way that a team represents their arguments – such as their language choice. In some ways a representation critique is similar to making a decision based on appearance or characteristics. In our above example, you might choose not to eat at Denny's because of the way they treated other customers, not the taste of their food or their prices.

Examples of Critiques

Some examples from debate rounds include critiques of gendered language such as "mankind" or "Congressman". Another would be a critique of the concept of "Sub-Saharan Africa."

Critiques have components that are in some ways similar to other types of arguments. They typically have "link" arguments, where the negative connects the specific actions of the affirmative to their critique claims. There are also "impact" arguments where the negative identifies the implications of the critique. Finally, some critiques offer "alternative" ways of viewing the world, or alternative representations. These often function very similarly to counterplans. Alternatives can be explicit or implied.

Implications

Generally, critiques have a couple of implications. One is that they undermine some part of the affirmative Case such as the Harm or Solvency. Second, they might implicate consequences similar to that of a disadvantage. In other words, a critique might justify voting against a team altogether in order to reject their assumptions.

Affirmative Strategies

Affirmatives can attack critiques at a number of levels. They can argue their affirmative outweighs the critique. They can deny the link to their representation. They can try to formulate a permutation similar to against a counterplan. They can attack the "Solvency" of the critique alternative, or argue drawbacks to the alternative. They might be able to find some inconsistencies within the negative arguments.

COACHING THE SPEECH: FIRST NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE

The First Negative Constructive speech (1NC) lays the foundation for the negative strategy in the debate. In this speech the negative starts every major argument that is part of their strategy. The main job of the 1NC is to present all of the negative attacks against the affirmative Case. They should also present “shells” of all of their Off-Case arguments (topicality, disadvantages, counterplans, critiques). The 1NC should build a solid negative policy to defend, whether that be a defense of the status quo or a counterplan.

Preparation

You can **prepare for the 1NC days before the actual debate**. Pre-tournament and pre-round work can get the 1NC all set to go. Choosing the best Case and Off-Case arguments ahead of time leads to making the right selections. Against common case Harm areas the 1NC responses can be completely written out. The negative should write “front-lines” of arguments whenever possible.

Selection

The 1NC should **avoid repetitive arguments**. Repeating arguments make it too easy for the affirmative team to answer. This is true both for Case and Off-Case arguments. Make sure your disadvantages do not have similar link or impact arguments. Do not present duplicative Case arguments. The 1NC should attack as many aspects of the affirmative Case as possible.

Presentation

The 1NC should **read their Off-Case arguments first** and then proceed to their Case attacks. Off-Case “shell” arguments have to be read in a complete form, with each logical component being included. Try to divide your speech roughly equally between the time you spend on the Case and Off-Case.

Specific Links

Many Off-Case arguments are “generic,” meaning they apply to many different affirmative Plans. This is a powerful weapon for the negative as it helps them be more familiar with their negative strategies. On the other hand, judges may not like it when they think the negative is running the same arguments every round, regardless of whether they really apply to that specific affirmative Plan. In order to make your generic arguments seem relevant, **include a specific link argument in the 1NC shell**. That means you should write out a sentence or two that explains the connection between your argument and the specific affirmative.

Delivery Style

The 1NC should be **delivered quickly but clearly**. The appropriate speed will be governed, as in most cases, by the experience level of the judge. Clarity is as important for the 1NC as it is for the 1AC as it is the first impression the judge will have of your arguments, and set the stage for later references back.

Analytical Case Arguments

Some debaters think they can’t make an argument unless they have evidence. This is not true. Analytical arguments (arguments without evidence) can be very powerful. It is often very easy to poke holes in the affirmative Case by **making logical arguments**. These types of points should be added to your Case attack, mixed in with evidence-based arguments. Focus your strategy and attacks on the largest, most threatening parts of the affirmative Case.

COACHING THE SPEECH: SECOND NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE

The Second Negative Constructive speech (2NC) is one of the most important negative speeches in the debate. The 2NC typically extends two or three of the Off-Case argument shells that were presented in the 1NC. These arguments are typically the key parts of the negative strategy, and the likely place where the negative team will end up trying to win the debate in the end.

Preparing

Much of the preparation for the 2NC can be done at home before the tournament. You pretty much know, either through brainstorming or through experience of actual debates, what the 2AC is going to say against your Off-Case shells. You can **prepare front-lines, with analytic and evidenced answers**, to read against the 2AC.

Before you stand up to give your 2NC it is really important that you **know and understand everything the 2AC said** to your arguments. If you need to ask for clarification in cross-examination, you should do that. If you have the time to read through the evidence they read you should try to do that. Asking to borrow the 2AC blocks after the read them is the surest way to make sure you don't miss anything.

Tactics

You start by making a **short “regional” overview** at the top of the flow for that argument. The regional overview should contain a short explanation of all pieces of your argument. Make the link as specific as possible to the affirmative Plan or Case. For example, when you extend a disadvantage your regional overview should include a sentence on the link, uniqueness and impact. The regional overview is a way of summarizing the argument for the judge, and helps pull it all together.

After the regional overview the 2NC should **cover all of the 2AC arguments**, usually one-by-one, without skipping over any. On some arguments you'll need to read evidence, in some cases you won't need to. In part that depends on whether the 2AC used evidence or not.

Rebuild the key parts of the Off-Case arguments by reading more evidence if necessary. This is often referred to as having a “wall” of extensions, i.e. the “link wall” or the “uniqueness wall.” But don't forget to use and extend the 1NC shell evidence, as that is usually the best evidence you have. Refer to it by author and explain the warrants in the evidence. Stress the specific link arguments.

Finally, **weigh or assess the impact** of winning the Off-Case argument. If it is a DA, explain how it outweighs the affirmative; if it is a K, explain how it undercuts the Solvency or turns the Case; if it is a CP, point out how it solves the case while avoiding the DAs. Reading additional impact evidence is usually a solid strategy.

Strategy

The 2NC should **choose one Off-Case argument to be the primary strategy**, but generally they should not make this choice obvious. If you tip your hand to the affirmative too early in the debate they will know to focus on it. The 2NC should extend two or three arguments so they can disguise their intentions and to maintain flexibility. What looks like a sure thing before the 2NC may seem iffy or a second choice by the time the 2NR rolls around.

COACHING THE SPEECH: FIRST NEGATIVE REBUTTAL

The First Negative Rebuttal speech (1NR) is the second part of the Negative Block – where they give back-to-back speeches in the middle part of the debate. The 1NR is a very important part of the overall negative strategy and should not be underestimated. A powerful 1NR puts great pressure on the affirmative team, particularly the First Affirmative Rebuttal.

Case Extension

The 1NR should **focus on extending the most powerful attacks** on the affirmative Case. Using the 5-step extension technique (page 5), the 1NR should base their speech on the 1NC arguments, while answering what the 2AC had to say on those points. The agenda of this part of the 1NR should be the 1NC. The 1NR should signpost back to the 1NC structure.

Explain the 1NC arguments fully, including **developing the warrants in the original evidence**. The reasoning within the evidence, not just the old tag line, is the important part that needs to be expanded and impacted. The full use of the 1NC warrants is the strategy that makes the 1NR an A+.

The 1NR should **be somewhat selective**, if necessary, among the various arguments begun in the 1NC, as some of those initial points may not be worth it. Some arguments have “round winning” potential, others are kind of trivial. You likely won’t have time to go for all of the 1NC points, especially if you are expanding them as you are supposed to. So you’ll need to be selective and realistic.

The goal in extending Case arguments is to **rebuild them** to the point where they are really powerful and do-or-die for the affirmative team. It is not very strategic to extend negative arguments so weakly that they barely register. The 1NR should explain the impact of these arguments as fully as they can.

One way for the 1NR to make their extensions more powerful is to **read additional evidence**. It might even be a good idea to save some of your best Case evidence for reading in the 1NR where it is much more difficult for the affirmative to answer.

The 1NR should **clash directly with the most threatening affirmative Case arguments**. This ideally should be done in a word-for-word manner to make clear to the judge that you are not ducking the big Case debate. If the 2AC highlights certain evidence or arguments to the judge, you need to go after them with a direct response.

Off-Case Extension

Some times the 1NR is assigned to extend an Off-Case argument, such as topicality or a disadvantage. It is possible for the 1NR to do both the Case (or part of the Case) and extend an Off-Case argument. It all depends on where the biggest need is. While it may be possible to do this, you don’t want to spread the 1NR too thin, making all the arguments they cover really easy for the affirmative to answer.

In the Off-Case extension the 1NR should follow the advice given above (page 23) for the 2NC in going for these arguments. Start with a short “regional” overview. Cover the 2AC in a thorough, line-by-line, manner. Read more evidence on the key points. Emphasize the specific link. Weigh or assess the implications of winning that argument.

COACHING THE SPEECH: SECOND NEGATIVE REBUTTAL

The second negative rebuttal (2NR) is the most difficult speech in a debate. It requires substantial coverage and explanation skills. The 2NR must tie together the entire negative strategy, extending each part in detail and creating a favorable impression. They must also cover the many arguments of the 1AR. The 2NR has to balance all these factors, and then throw in being responsible for the strategic decision-making for the team.

Strategies

The most important strategic goal for the 2NR is to, in fact, **have a strategy**. While this sounds obvious, many 2NR's simply go through the motions of trying to win every argument. Instead, the 2NR must assess how the strategy is working up to that point and make a decision about the right mix of the Case or Off-Case arguments, and choosing among the Off-Case arguments.

The 2NR should **adapt to the weaknesses and strengths of the 1AR**. No two 1AR's are alike. Some might make serious coverage mistakes in unexpected places. When the 1AR makes a serious coverage or time allocation mistake the 2NR must maintain enough flexibility to adjust and capitalize. There are no degree-of-difficulty points in debate. If the other team presents an unforeseen opportunity, take it.

The 2NR must attempt to **anticipate the 2AR strategic choices**. The more experience you have, the more easily this will come. The more times you debate a certain team the more you can expect what they will go for in the last rebuttal. The 2NR should focus on that strategy and extend enough arguments against it to neutralize it. While the 2NR may want to make some reference to your opponent's upcoming speech, it is generally more effective to internalize the chess game and just shape your 2NR to pre-empt their strategy.

The 2NR must **evaluate all your impacts** in the debate, whether it that means choosing which disadvantage to extend, or emphasizing case advantage turns. You may have to decide between a counterplan strategy vs. kicking the counterplan. You may have to decide between a critique and a counterplan.

Techniques

Repetition is fatal for the 2NR. The goal of the 2NR should be to make **five minutes of totally separate arguments**. If you sense that you are repeating the same argument in several places in the debate you should correct that by diversifying your positions. Do not over-rely on one argument, one assessment, or one insight.

The 2NR should **begin with an overview** briefly explaining how they will win the debate. This overview should not last more than 30 seconds. It should compare the arguments each side will win and say this comes down favorably for the negative. Be realistic about the arguments the affirmative may win. It's a waste of time to just get up there and say you are winning everything.

The 2NR **chooses which Off-Case arguments to go for**. They have to (very quickly) kick out of the ones they don't want, and then thoroughly extend the ones they do want. On those, they must answer everything the 1AR said on that flow. It is crucial not to miss anything.

The 2NR also needs to **extend the key Case answers**. They will probably have to focus on a few of them, though, given the time constraints. They should choose the ones where the affirmative is the weakest and the negative has the best warrants.